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The Month of St. Francis.

MONTH DEDICATED

TO THE

Seraphic Patriarch St. Francis

BY

HIS CHILDREN AND DEVOUT CLIENTS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF FATHER CANDIDO MARIOTTI,

AT

THE REQUEST OF THE FRANCISCAN FATHERS,

STRATFORD, LONDON, E.

With a Commendatory Letter from

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MANNING,

ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER.

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FR. BERNARDUS VAN LOO,
Provinciæ Anglo-Belgicæ Minister.

Mechliniæ, Sept. 6, 1878.

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER.

I COMMEND to the faithful the following Meditations and Devotions in honour of our Seraphic Patron, St. Francis. If the world had grown cold in his day it is, I fear, colder in ours; and if his fervour, humility, poverty, and love to God and man, and to all the works of God, were needed then, they are more needed now, when luxury, intellectual vainglory, and the 'pride of life' have so far banished God from society, science, and the souls of men. The world was converted by the humility, poverty, and charity of Jesus in the beginning, and it will be converted by nothing else at this day.

HENRY EDWARD,
Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis, 1878.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

ALL those who are not entirely ignorant of the various events of this century, which, by upsetting religion, politics, and science, have disturbed and indeed destroyed the tranquillity of nations, must agree that society is at present in a state of transition, passing from one period of existence to another which promises to be more inclined towards good than the preceding.

If left to itself the world would, no doubt, go from bad to worse; but trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, who made the nations of the earth capable of being healed, we have a certain hope and firm confidence that the future will bring great advantages to the Catholic Church, and consequently great blessings to society. We have a sure sign of this in the very persecutions which are raised against the Church in so many countries, and in the consequent reawakening of faith throughout the world.

We have also many other motives for hope and consolation: the constant united prayers which ascend to heaven from all parts of the earth; the consecration of all the faithful to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the generous and spontaneous assistance which has been offered to the Sovereign Pontiff in his poverty; the number of loving children who hastened to console their Father in his bitter and unjust captivity; the

devout pilgrimages which are being made to all the most renowned sanctuaries; and still more the noble courage with which we see those around us renounce honours, public and lucrative offices, and accept generously spoliation, confiscation, fines, nay, even exile or imprisonment for religion's sake. We may also add the Catholic meetings, associations, and congresses which are constantly assembling, and which remind us of those days of lively faith in which St. Francis lived, and the universal wish expressed that the Third Order of the 'poor one of Assisi' may flourish and increase in these days as of old; till, as St. Bonaventure expresses it, this stream of heavenly grace rising in the valley of Spoleto becomes so large and powerful a river as to rejoice by its waters the whole Church of God.

Considering, then, all these motives for hope and confidence, let us, whilst lamenting over the miseries and troubles which are permitted by God to assail us for our chastisement, and which we have in great measure brought upon ourselves, by neglecting the divine law and choosing silver and gold for our God,—let us, I repeat, take courage, for I believe, and you, my dear readers, will I am sure join me in believing, that our holy Father St. Francis and his children (if only they are faithful to his spirit and follow his example) will have a great share in the salutary change of society; as great perhaps as they had in the Middle Ages, when it was said that the whole world had turned Franciscan. I confess that when we look around us and see religious dispersed, convents confiscated or destroyed, the realisation of such hopes seems scarcely probable; but we must on the other hand consider the great extension of the Third Order, especially in France and Italy; the numerous writers, both ecclesiastical

and secular, who are making the spirit and institute of St. Francis more known; and above all the spirit of the saint himself infused by him into his children—a spirit of simplicity, sweetness, and love; a perfect copy of the spirit of Jesus Christ Himself: all which thoughts will contribute to strengthen our confidence and courage.

Pondering for some time over these things, I ask myself whether it would not be well to epitomise this spirit of our holy Father, so visibly manifested in his words and works, in a devout and instructive book, which would speak briefly of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, of St. Francis and his life, of ourselves and our duties, accommodating all to the wants of these present times, so that it might be useful to the religious of all the three Orders, and also to his devout clients, whatever their state of life might be. In order to have some order and determined object in this work, it occurred to me that it would be well to put it in the shape of a 'Month consecrated to the Seraphic Patriarch St. Francis,' as we see done by many who consecrate certain months to particular saints, as our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, and others. I spoke of my purpose to superiors, and received from them not merely approval, but blessing and encouragement. Strengthened by their kindness I at once commenced this little work, and I now offer it as it is to you, my brethren. If you find anything good or useful in it, do not attribute it to me, but to the sources from which I drew my information concerning the matter contained in this volume; but if you notice many faults and imperfections (as you doubtless will do), be assured that these proceed from my weakness and ignorance, but not from carelessness or wilful negligence. I have found it impossible to

confine myself throughout this work to what would *be* equally applicable to the First and Third Orders; if I had done so, I should have been obliged to speak only in general terms, and the book would have lost all practical utility, besides becoming tedious and insipid to the reader. If, on the other hand, I had addressed myself first to one class of readers, and then to the other, all clearness and connection of ideas would have been destroyed, and the book rendered uninteresting to both.

These observations having been made, I will conclude by quoting the words of Mgr. Ségur, the illustrious author of the *Life of St. Francis*, who says: 'When men know St. Francis they will love him; may they, when they love him, begin to imitate him. In these days, as in the days of St. Francis, we want saints and true Christians. The human race is being lost by pride and sensuality; may the humility and mortification of the sons of St. Francis save it from perdition.' And if by applying these words to ourselves they bring forth fruit at least in our own souls, I shall be amply repaid for the time and labour bestowed upon this little work. May the blessing of our Lord and St. Francis be with you!

Fr. Candido da Galiole,
Min. Obs.

Ragusa in Dalmatia,
July 25, 1875.

MONTH DEDICATED

TO THE

Seraphic Patriarch St. Francis.

FIRST DAY.

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Preparatory Prayer.

Enlighten, O Lord, we beseech Thee, with a ray of Thy eternal wisdom, the darkness of our minds, and inflame our hearts with a spark of Thy ardent love; that, as we meditate on the great virtues and merits of our seraphic Father St. Francis, we may each and all of us endeavour, as true children, to imitate his life upon earth, as he strove to imitate the life of Thy only-begotten Son; that we may thus be united with him in heaven.

Meditation.

ST. FRANCIS WAS THE MOST PERFECT IMITATOR OF JESUS CHRIST.

First Point.—Original sin, in which we are all born, brought two great evils upon mankind: the loss of eternal life and the rebellion of the passions. From the moment that first sin was committed, man's intellect, darkened and confused, lost sight of the eternal truths, of its last end; his will, weakened and op-

pressed by many obstacles, became almost incapable of practising virtue or performing good works; and his heart, corrupted in great measure by passion, turned to earthly and sensual objects, and attached itself to them. Thus in a short time all the human race, save only a few privileged souls who remained faithful to God, was plunged in a monstrous abyss of crime and error. In this state the world remained for 4000 years; at the end of which time God, in His infinite mercy, not wishing any longer to behold the work of His hands so miserably degraded, sent from heaven His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, to raise up and save poor human nature. In order to do this, Jesus Christ, after having taken to Himself a human body, and led a life poor and suffering, but full of examples for our instruction, shed the last drop of His Blood upon the cross for us. Man was thus redeemed, restored to the friendship of God, and the right to eternal glory; having only to coöperate with grace in order to merit this glory by good and virtuous actions, and by imitating as nearly as possible His divine model Jesus Christ, who says of Himself, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father but through Me.' If He is the way, we are bound, as the Apostle St. Peter tells us, to follow in His footsteps; if He is the truth, we should believe, says the Apostle St. Paul, all that He has taught; if He is the life, we must always remain united to Him by charity and sanctifying grace, according to the Apostle St. John, or else we shall become as withered branches, fit only for everlasting fire. Yes, it is only on this condition that we can expect to participate in the fruits of redemption; only on this condition that we may glory in the name of followers of Christ, and hope to obtain

eternal happiness, towards which we should all tend as to our last end.

Second Point.—After God had done so much for man—after He had redeemed him by the Precious Blood of His only Son, after He had shown him the way of salvation by His doctrine and examples, after He had enriched him with innumerable graces and blessings, and given him the Sacraments to assist him to persevere—man ungratefully forgot the favours bestowed upon him, and, after a few centuries, fervour and charity becoming cold, the human race fell again into the old abyss of misery and error. The many saints and holy men, raised up by God to recall them from this perilous road, were powerless to stem the torrent; the voice of the Church and the Sovereign Pontiffs was alike unheeded; and by the end of the twelfth century incontinence, tyranny, ignorance, crimes, and discord reigned supreme. But God, ever rich in mercy, resolved again to raise mankind from the depths of misery into which it had fallen, and chose one man from many others, who, resembling as much as possible the Son of God in virtue and grace, should appear to the world as a perfect follower of the Gospel, a model of all virtues, a masterpiece of holiness. This man was our seraphic Father St. Francis! This is the idea, the thought, that should be ever before our minds; this is the peculiar privilege which marks him out and distinguishes him from all other saints,—that he was in all things a perfect copy of Jesus Christ. No one who studies his life will deny this. We will not dwell upon the fact that he had a precursor in that poor unknown man, who went about the streets of Assisi, crying out, 'Peace and happiness, peace and happiness,' nor on what St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine

of Sienna, Leo X., and others affirm, viz. that he had also a prophet to foretell his greatness; for they apply to him that passage in the Apocalypse in which St. John says, 'I saw another angel coming from the east, bearing the sign of the living God.' In the events of his life we have ample proofs of our assertion. He was born in a stable, and laid upon straw; at the commencement of his preaching he had twelve disciples, one of whom was a Judas, and hanged himself; to these he afterwards added seventy-two others; he fasted forty days in a desert without any food, excepting half a loaf of bread; but above all he received on Mount Alvernia the impression of the five Sacred Wounds which Jesus Christ bore upon His body. Surely all these are proof sufficient of the great resemblance which he bore to the Son of God. These, however, are merely external circumstances; but the greatest and most exact resemblance was in his spirit and works, in the end he proposed to himself, and the means which he made use of to attain this end. This we shall clearly see as we proceed with these meditations.

Third Point.—Let us consider, my brethren, how great and special a grace God has bestowed upon us in calling us, either entirely, or at least partially, out of this world, and causing us to enlist in the glorious army of so renowned a leader. What a glory, what a privilege, it is for us to be the children of such a Father! Let us rejoice and bless God; for, indeed, we have good reason to be grateful for so great a mercy. But let us constantly bear in mind that St. Francis says to us what St. Paul said to the Corinthians: 'Therefore I beseech you, as my dearest children, be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.' It is only on

this condition that he will recognise us as his children; only in this way that we may glory in belonging to him. Let us now cast a searching and impartial glance upon ourselves. Is our conduct in the world, and amongst our brethren, actuated by the spirit of charity and humility which animated our seraphic Father? Are our thoughts, our desires, for God or for self? Do we propose for our end only the greater glory of God, the salvation of others, the sanctification of our own souls? If we find ourselves only too unlike our Father and model, let us at once resolve to amend, lest what ought to be to us a cause of joy and honour should become a source of sorrow and confusion. For, as the pious Gerson tells us, 'it is not the habit and the tonsure, but the change of life and entire mortification of the passions, which make the true religious.' Let us never, O my brethren, be heard to say, let us never even think, that this century is different from the one in which St. Francis lived; that we cannot bear now the poverty and restraint which were practised in those days. Surely if St. Paul forbids all the faithful, without exception, to conform to the fashion of this world, how much more would he forbid us, who make special profession of piety and mortification! What would he say to us, who, as religious, are bound to oppose, by our preaching and example, all maxims that are contrary to the Gospel?

Example.

When St. Francis was still in the world, but already converted to God, and seeking only how he could best please Him, as he was walking in the country, pondering in his heart upon heavenly things, he passed one day by the church of St. Damian, then

almost in ruins, and entered in to pray. Whilst there, kneeling before a crucifix, his mind was inflamed with heavenly consolations, and fixing his eyes, filled with tears of devotion, upon the figure of Christ crucified, he heard a voice, which said to him three times, 'Francis, depart hence, and apply thyself to the repairing of My house, which, as thou seest, is falling into ruins.' Francis, knowing himself to be alone, was at first filled with terror at the sound of the mysterious voice; then, penetrated by the divine words which had been spoken to him, he was ravished in ecstasy. When he returned to himself, he at once prepared to obey, and set himself to work to repair the material church, which was falling into ruins; although the words pronounced applied still more to the Universal Church, which Christ had redeemed by His Precious Blood, as he acknowledged to his brethren the Holy Ghost revealed to him soon after. That this restoration was meant in a spiritual sense was still further proved by the vision which Innocent III. had in his sleep. It seemed to him that the church of St. John Lateran, the mother and mistress of all the churches, was falling, and that a poor despised man supported it on his shoulders. When, afterwards, St. Francis applied to this Pope to obtain the confirmation of his Rule, the Supreme Pontiff understood that through his means the vision should be fulfilled, and exclaimed, 'This poor man is indeed chosen, by his teaching and works, to support the Church of Christ.' And the prophecy proved true.

Maxim of the Saint.

'We ought to do all according to the model which is offered to us in the person of Jesus Christ.'

PRAYER.

O Lord our God, we return Thee from our hearts the most grateful thanks, because, besides the great graces of creation and redemption, by which Thou hast made us Thy children and heirs of heaven, Thou hast also called us to serve Thee under the standard of Thy faithful servant, the glorious patriarch St. Francis. This is surely a sign of special love towards us; an evident proof that we are called, not merely to be saved, but to become saints, and to attain a high perfection. We beseech Thee to add still one most necessary grace to those already bestowed upon us: grant that we may imitate, as nearly as possible, the spirit and the actions of our seraphic Father, even as he, whilst in this life, imitated so closely Thy Divine Son; that so, being like him on earth, by the practice of all Christian and religious virtues, we may be united to him for ever in eternity.

Five Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory be to the Father, in honour of the sacred Stigmata of our seraphic Father.

V. Pray for us, O holy Father St. Francis.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, who, by the merits of our holy Father St. Francis, dost increase Thy Church by a new progeny, grant us, by imitating him, to despise earthly things, and ever to rejoice in the participation of heavenly gifts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Out of the depths, &c.

SECOND DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as on first day, page 1.

MEDITATION.

ST. FRANCIS PERFECTLY OVERCAME HIMSELF.

First Point.—Our Divine Master says to His disciples, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me.' Therefore no one need expect to follow Christ, or to attain to perfection or sanctity, until he denies and overcomes himself. Our delicate and weak nature finds this truth indeed hard and unpalatable; therefore all the doctors of the Church, all the saints, all the masters of the spiritual life, constantly repeat and inculcate this important maxim. Their teaching is summed up in a sentence from that golden book, the *Imitation of Christ*, in which we are told that we shall advance in perfection in proportion as we do violence to self. But what is meant by denying and overcoming oneself? St. Paul explains it by that beautiful similitude of the old and new man which we all have in us. The old man, created according to the guilty Adam, seeks to indulge his passions; loves show and riches; is puffed up by pride and ambition; finds his happiness in the vain and deceitful pleasures of the senses; despises others; loves only himself, and seeks in all things his own gratification. On the contrary, the new man, created according to God and Jesus Christ, in holiness and sanctity, is meek and humble of heart, as St. Jerome tells us; if he is struck, he does not return the blow; if he is cursed, he answers by blessing; and he thus conquers pride by humility. If, then, says the Apostle, we desire really to overcome self, we must 'put off the old

man, and put on the new.' This is indeed a very difficult and arduous task, and few succeed in it entirely; but we must nevertheless do our utmost, and with the help of God's grace we may hope to render ourselves worthy to follow Christ, and, by so doing, to arrive at eternal life.

Second Point.—Yes, we repeat it, this overcoming self is a painful and difficult task; so much so, that Gerson tells us there is nothing so difficult; and it is not done in a moment, nor in a day: it lasts usually throughout our whole life. But when God makes choice of any one (no matter how sinful and undeserving he may be) as His instrument for the good of souls, He gives him an extraordinary and efficacious grace, by which he at once gains this victory over self, and turns with his whole heart and soul to God. Take, for example, St. Paul, St. Augustin, and many others who were in a moment changed from sinners to saints. So it was in a certain degree with St. Francis, although he had never been wicked or licentious, but only a little worldly and fond of pleasure. Upon hearing one day the above-quoted words of Christ, in which He commands us to deny ourselves, Francis resolved to give up all he had until then so ardently loved, and so eagerly sought after, and to follow his crucified Lord in poverty and suffering. He then, in the flower of his age, renounced the rich dress and love of display, which had hitherto distinguished him even amongst other youths of his own age and station, and, casting all earthly pleasures far from him, he clothed himself with a ragged tunic given him by a poor peasant. He, who until that moment had thought only of worldly glory and military renown, who would not have let the smallest offence pass unavenged, traversed in this poor

garb the streets of his native town, and suffered patiently, nay joyfully, the insults, the contempt, and even the blows of his relations and of his own father; endured without a word the scoffs of his brother, and of the very children, who treated him as a fool. He, who until then had spent his days in feasting with his companions, and indulged freely in all lawful amusements, might now be seen begging a crust of bread from door to door, or a little soup in a porringer, which he would eat seated on the roadside, or even in the public street, in order that all might see and laugh at him. He, who used to boast, and could truly boast, of belonging to one of the most wealthy families of Assisi, now, finding that the pride and avarice of his father made him oppose his progress in perfection, left his home, and publicly renounced, not only his inheritance, but his father himself, saying to him, 'Until now I have called you my father upon earth; but for the future I shall no longer consider you as such; and so I shall be able more truly and with greater confidence to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven." Yes, God alone shall be my Father, in Him alone I trust.'

In this way St. Francis entirely overcame himself, and consecrated himself, body and soul, to God. Surely we need not wonder that so generous and ardent a soul should be raised by God to great sanctity, and appear a very prodigy of grace.

Third Point.—Jesus Christ addresses to us the very same words which He addressed to the Apostles, to St. Francis, and indeed to all the saints: 'If any one will come after Me, he must deny himself.' And we indeed, moved by His grace, have obeyed His call: some of us by entirely abandoning the world, and seeking, in *the seraphic Order* of St. Francis, to lead a life of

poverty, humility, and mortification until death; others remaining indeed in the world, but only as strangers and pilgrims, who are travelling onwards to a heavenly country. But, let us ask ourselves, have we really given up the world and the things of the world—not merely exteriorly, but in spirit and affection? for true detachment consists in this. Is the life we have been leading, perhaps for so many years, in our convent or in our home, really religious and devout, really poor and mortified, not merely outwardly, but in the interior of our souls, in our own hearts? What progress have we made in overcoming self? Let us examine our thoughts and actions. Do we not feel the empire of that cursed self-love, which makes us resent every little offence given to us, every unfortunate accident, every correction and humiliation, however well deserved? Have we any secret pride lurking in our hearts, which makes us think ourselves of great importance, which causes us to look down on others as beneath us in virtue or talents, which makes us long for honours, dignities, and privileges? Are we not fond of an easy and comfortable life? Do we not try to avoid labour, poverty, fatigue, and the trials of our vocation, and do we not seek for idleness, ease, pleasures, and recreations unsuited to the religious state? If, my brethren, after this examination our conscience reproach us, even with only a few things, we may be sure that not only we have not yet overcome self, but that we are still far from obtaining this necessary victory. Let us, then, seriously reflect, that if we wish to be true followers of St. Francis, if we wish to advance in virtue, nay, if we wish to be saved, we must overcome self, or we shall never reach heaven. St. Philip Neri says, '*Heaven is not for* cowards;' and our Divine Lord tells

us, 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and only the violent bear it away.'

EXAMPLE.

The feeling which was perhaps strongest in our holy Father, and which it cost him the most to subdue, was the great repugnance and disgust he had for lepers (of which there were numbers in those days); so that if he saw one he would instantly turn aside, to avoid the sight and smell of so repulsive an object. God, however, required this sacrifice of him, and gave him an opportunity of making it. One day, as Francis was riding along a plain near to Assisi, he saw a leper coming towards him. His first impulse was to turn back, so as to avoid him; but he remembered the words he had heard, pronounced by Christ Himself, that if he wished to arrive at perfection he must overcome nature. Remembering also that Jesus Christ had appeared to him in the form of a leper on the cross, he got off his horse, hastened to meet the miserable man, and gave him abundant alms; and, in order entirely to subdue himself, he kissed him. Mounting his horse again, and looking round, he could nowhere see the leper, who had disappeared. He then understood that that kiss and those alms had been given to Christ Himself. Upon this, filled with joy, and almost ravished in ecstasy, he sang praises to God, and resolved to proceed to still greater victories over himself. From that moment his horror of lepers was changed into an ardent love; and, instead of avoiding them, he would seek for them, make their beds, wash their sores, and perform the most humble offices towards them. See, my brethren, how St. Francis strove to overcome self, and how marvel*lously he succeeded.* He used to say to his brethren,

'The greatest of all the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which God bestows on His faithful servants, is the grace of overcoming self.'

Maxim of the Saint.

'No one can possess any virtue whatever until he has at least *begun* to die to himself.'

Prayer.

O God, since our seraphic Father has taught us that the grace of overcoming self is the greatest of Thy gifts, we implore Thee most earnestly to bestow it upon us. Although we have passed many years in Thy service, and it is long since we entered upon the path of perfection, we find, to our shame, there is much of the 'old man' still alive within us; we are still slaves to self-love, which causes us to forget Thee and to neglect many of our Christian and religious duties. 'Create in us, O Lord,' we will exclaim with the Royal Prophet, 'create in us a clean heart,' pure from all worldly or sensual affections, 'and renew a right spirit within us'—a spirit of justice, virtue, and wisdom. Grant us this grace, we beseech Thee, through the intercession of Thy faithful servant Francis, who gained so glorious a victory over himself; and we promise Thee to strive until death to obtain the same triumph, which will be the beginning and foundation of a truly holy and spiritual life, and a pledge of our future glory in heaven.

Five Our Fathers, &c., as on the first day, page 7.

THIRD DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as on first day, page 1.

MEDITATION.

LIVELY AND EFFICACIOUS FAITH OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—The Apostle St. Paul, writing to the Jews, tells them 'that without faith it is impossible to please God.' And Christ Himself says, 'He who will not believe is already judged;' that is to say, condemned. But why is it that faith is so necessary? that without it we cannot even have a hope of salvation? The reason is evident. The great mysteries of our faith—the existence of God, One in essence and Three in Persons; original sin; the Incarnation of God the Son; the work of grace in our souls; the efficacy of the Sacraments; predestination; and many other fundamental and essential dogmas of our august religion, the knowledge of which is obligatory on all faithful Christians—are not things which we can grasp by our senses, and far surpass our understanding.

How, then, can we realise their importance, or even their existence, excepting through faith? It is by faith, by faith alone, that we can enter into the way of salvation; that we can hold communion with God; that we can raise our minds and hearts to spiritual things: without faith we are miserable worms, able only to crawl upon the earth and to lead a sensual and earthly life. Therefore St. Augustin truly calls this virtue the foundation of our spiritual life; St. Ambrose speaks of it as the first beginning of the Christian; St. Chrysostom as the foundation of religion; and Clement of Alexandria tells us it is as necessary to the Christian soul as the air we breathe. But our own seraphic doctor

St. Bonaventure speaks still more clearly: 'Faith,' he says, 'is a sure foundation, a resplendent light, a door which opens to us the knowledge of things; according to the extent of our faith, we can estimate the amount of heavenly wisdom bestowed upon us by God, so that, as the Apostle tells us, we are not to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise.'

In a word, as regards eternity, faith is all in all to us if it be entire, pure, lively, and, above all, efficacious, so that, as St. Gregory tells us, 'we do not contradict by our actions what we confess with our lips.' This is the true faith by which the just man lives, which overcomes the world, and leads to eternal life.

Second Point.—It is not necessary for me, my brethren, to prove to you the purity, integrity, and most perfect orthodoxy of the faith of St. Francis; that man specially sent from God to help the Church; that man who was wholly Catholic and Apostolic, and who so closely resembled our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. But what is most remarkable and most admirable in him is the liveliness and efficaciousness of his faith. His one desire was that God, Jesus Christ, and all the truths taught by our holy religion should be known and firmly believed throughout the whole world. He was ready, and even anxious, to give his blood and his life in confirmation of these truths, if God had so willed it. Knowing, by divine inspiration, that he was specially chosen by God to proclaim the faith and spread it everywhere, he conceived the noble and sublime idea of sending missioners to all the infidel nations of the earth. In fact, one day seeing himself surrounded by a group of disciples, all animated with the same fervour and zeal, filled with a holy joy, as if certain of success, he addressed to them a discourse

resembling that which his Divine Master addressed to His disciples: 'Let us understand, my dearly beloved brethren, what our vocation is. We have been called by a most merciful God not to save ourselves only, but many others. He has called us in order that we may traverse the whole world, exhorting all to do penance, and to keep the commandments of God; and this more by our example than by our words. It is true we appear simple and foolish in the eyes of the world; but that need not make you fear. Take courage, and have confidence, that God, who has overcome the world, may speak efficaciously through your ministry. The kingdom of God, which lasts for ever, will be your recompense. Take courage, then, my children; divide the world amongst you, and everywhere preach peace to men.' Then, making the sign of the cross towards the four corners of the earth, he divided them, two and two, appointing a special mission to each couple; and then he himself set out with one companion to conquer the world for Jesus Christ, longing to be allowed to die for the faith. Where shall we find a more lively or a more efficacious faith?

Third Point.—I hope and believe, dear brethren, that this holy faith is, by God's grace, pure and entire in our hearts. But let us beware of any delusion; the present times are as dangerous as, perhaps more dangerous than, any that have preceded them. Naturalism, on the one hand, rejects everything that does not come under the empire of sense; rationalism, on the other, rejects all that our poor weak reason is incapable of understanding; and, worse than all, indifference or liberalism either openly despises, or at least neglects, all that has to do with God, the soul, or religion. These errors, which are unfortunately so common

amongst Catholics, not only stain and weaken our faith, but often, alas, destroy it entirely. The reading of certain journals and irreligious books, in which these errors are openly broached; contracting friendship with certain persons; frequenting certain assemblies; joining certain associations; and many other things of this kind, become real dangers for one who has not a mature judgment, great virtue, and who is not very well instructed in the true faith. Let us remember, O my brethren, that faith is a most precious gift of God, which will be taken away from those who abuse it, or who do not care to guard it. Faith is a virtue, and a fundamental virtue; and without sacrifices and great caution virtues are always lost.

We must also remember that we are the followers of that great patriarch, who said to his disciples, as we before mentioned: 'We are called, by the mercy of God, not to save ourselves only, but for the salvation of others.' What I mean by this is that our faith must be not only pure and entire, but lively and efficacious. Therefore we should all endeavour, some by preaching, others by teaching, or writing, or speaking, and every one by prayers and good example, to maintain this holy virtue in its purity and integrity in the hearts of the faithful; to revive it in the hearts of those who have unfortunately lost it; and to propagate it zealously amongst heretics and pagans.

Example.

St. Bonaventure tells us that St. Francis was so anxious to spread the faith of Christ, and to seal his own faith with his blood, that he went three times into the East, and the third time he succeeded in obtaining an interview with the Sultan of Egypt, who was then

encamped with a large army in front of Damietta. When he drew near to that city, St. Francis took with him a companion of most holy life, and, after a fervent prayer, he boldly advanced under its walls, and found the two armies of the Christians and the Turks just ready to attack each other. It seemed impossible to approach the camp, as the Sultan had promised a large sum of money to any one who should bring him the head of a Christian. But the imminent danger to which he was exposing himself could not deter Francis, the brave soldier of Christ, who desired nothing so much as death for his Lord. Therefore, recommending himself to God, he advanced towards the enemy's camp. On his road he met two sheep, and the sight of these innocent animals caused him great joy; and turning to his companion, he said, 'Brother, trust in the Lord, for in us shall be fulfilled the words of the Gospel, "I send you as lambs among wolves."' A few steps farther on they came upon some Saracen guards, who rushed upon them like fierce wolves, beat them, insulted them, and bound them with strong ropes. 'We are Christians,' said Francis boldly; 'take us to your lord.' Providence watched over them, and, instead of killing them, the soldiers took them to the Sultan. He asked them, 'Who are you? By whom are you sent? And why have you come here?' Francis answered, 'We are sent, my lord, not by men, but by the most high God, to teach the way of salvation to you and to your people, and to announce to you the truths of the Gospel.' And then he began to preach with great fervour, and to tell all present that there was one only God in Three Persons; and that the Son of God became man to save us from sin and hell. The Sultan, wonderful to relate, instead of becoming angry with this audacity, was

touched, and treated them in a friendly manner, listening to Francis for several days, and inviting him to remain with him. But the man of God answered, 'If you and your people will embrace the true faith I will very willingly remain with you, for the love of God. And if you cannot decide between His law and that of Mahomet, cause a great fire to be lighted here, and I will enter it together with one of your priests, that so you may know which to believe.' 'I do not believe,' answered the Sultan, 'that I could find any of my priests willing to enter the fire, or to suffer anything for their religion.' 'If you will promise,' said Francis, 'that you and your people will embrace the Christian faith if I am not burnt, I will enter the fire alone. In case I perish you must impute it to my sins; but if God preserves me unhurt you will acknowledge Jesus Christ to be true God and the Saviour of the world.' The Sultan, however, overcome by human respect, would not accept the proposal nor embrace the true faith; but he offered the saint precious and magnificent gifts, which the holy Father refused, despising them as if they were so much dung and filth. This contempt of riches caused the Sultan to conceive a great love and respect for the saint and his Order; and, according to a pious tradition, he was saved by the prayers of St. Francis, and received baptism at the hour of death. Francis, then, had to return to Italy a third time, with his ardent thirst for martyrdom unsatisfied.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Take courage, my brethren; arm yourselves with the armour of faith.'

Prayer.

Thou knowest, Lord, that we believe; but we

exclaim with the Apostles, 'Do Thou increase our faith;' we believe, indeed, but do Thou help our unbelief. Give us a pure and steadfast faith, by which we may be pleasing in Thy sight. We believe; but we entreat Thee to keep far from us all that could, even in the slightest degree, tarnish or obscure the brightness of our faith. We believe; but do Thou give us strength and courage, that we may be able to defend our faith against the attacks of its opponents; that we may endeavour to propagate it all over the world; and that we may be willing to give our blood and our life for it, as our seraphic Father so longed to do, and as so many of our religious brethren have done.

Five Paters, &c., as on first day, page 7.

FOURTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as on first day, page 1.

MEDITATION.

PERFECT SUBMISSION OF ST. FRANCIS TO THE CHURCH.

First Point.—Our Divine Master, speaking once to His disciples about the correction of evil-doers, told them that if private correction did not suffice to convert them they were to be denounced to the Church; and if they would not hear the Church they were to be treated as heathens and publicans. This seems a severe sentence, my brethren, and has always filled the enemies of the Church with indignation, as it appears a degradation to proud carnal-minded men to be obliged to submit to her judgment. But whether we like it or not we must submit to it, under pain of being separated from that Church and endangering our salvation. On

the other hand, nothing can be more just or reasonable than this command; for Jesus Christ, in order that the fruits of the redemption, which He had purchased for us with His Precious Blood, should remain for ever, left to His Church before He returned to His Father the deposit of all His heavenly doctrine, with the obligation of teaching it to the faithful, and of condemning all that is contrary to it, saying to His Apostles, who were the heads and pastors of His flock, 'Go, and instruct all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.' He left to her also full powers to command and enforce obedience, to bind and to loose, to absolve and to punish, saying to the Apostles, 'All that you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' And in order that she should never err in her teaching, nor abuse the power bestowed upon her, He promised His perpetual assistance to His Apostles, saying, 'Behold, I am with you all days, even to the end of the world.' And finally, in order to deter any one from daring to disobey or to oppose His Church, He assures her that He will consider as done to Himself all that is done against her; saying again to the Apostles, 'He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me.' After that, O my brethren, can we wonder that St. Paul, who penetrated perhaps deeper than any other man into the mysteries of divine wisdom, should have recourse to St. Peter as supreme head of the Church in the disputes which arose concerning Catholic doctrine? We need not be surprised to hear an Augustin, a very eagle amongst geniuses, deliver this grand and noteworthy opinion: 'I should not believe the Gospel if the authority of the Church did not oblige me to do so.' But what is

surprising, and most to be wondered at, is this, that ignorant insignificant men think nothing of disobeying the Church and opposing her in a thousand ways, and that they cannot be induced to believe that in so doing they disobey and oppose Christ Himself, by whom they will undoubtedly be destroyed and overcome, as all the enemies of the Church have been. Yes, the history of almost nineteen centuries affords infallible proofs of this to any one who is not blind both in mind and heart.

Second Point.—And Francis, who was in all things a model for imitation, always observed most exactly, as a pious writer remarks, obedience and respect towards the Holy Roman Church, the seat of the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, and jealously recommended this submission to his brethren even at the moment of his death. You must many times have noticed how, in the first chapter of the Rule, he says, 'Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church,' being fully persuaded, as he often said, that nothing can be perfect or lasting as concerned faith or the foundation of the religious Orders without the consent and approbation of the Sovereign Pontiff. He applied, in fact, many times to the Pope to obtain the confirmation of his Rule, although he had received it from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, and there was then no law obliging him to do so. He also had recourse to the Holy Father to obtain leave to preach the faith to the infidels, and to teach and instruct the faithful, although God Himself had revealed to him that he was chosen for that Apostolic ministry; also to obtain the confirmation of the celebrated Indulgence of Portiuncula, obtained for him by our Lady, and granted to him by *Jesus Christ Himself*; and then, again, to determine the

time. He had recourse to the Holy See in order to obtain leave to represent the nativity of our Lord by means of a Crib in Greccio, although it was merely an act of pious devotion. He applied to the Pope to obtain a Cardinal Protector for his Order, to watch over it and protect it from the vexations and calumnies which might be raised against it, and in this he was inspired by God Himself. When he composed the Rule of his admirable follower and daughter St. Clare he put in a special clause, which seemed to many unnecessary, obliging the Poor Clares to the most exact submission and obedience to the Church of Rome. And he did the same when later he composed the Third Rule, recommending most earnestly all the members to cultivate love, reverence, and humility to the infallible Chair of Peter. In the First Rule he says, 'All my brethren are to be Catholics; they are to act and to speak always as Catholics; and if any by words or actions should separate themselves from the Catholic way of living, and refuse to amend, let them be expelled the Order.' In short, my brethren, all the actions, all the thoughts, all the dispositions of Francis were marked by this spirit of humble submission; and it was to this, in great measure, that he owed his success in the grand and numerous works which he undertook for the good of the Church, for the salvation of souls; this was the reason why his Order increased so rapidly, and has continued for so many centuries, and often been strengthened and renewed by the powerful authority of the Church, which has from the beginning defended and watched over it with the greatest care.

Third Point.—We do not fear to assert, for the honour of God and of the Order, that the Friars Minor have *always* shown themselves worthy children and

followers of their great patriarch, by their unalterable love and attachment to the Church of Rome. 'It is worthy of remark,' says a Protestant historian of our own times, 'that everywhere we see the Franciscans in the service of the Pope; whilst in the service of the Emperor we find despotic knights like Ezzelino.' He is speaking, as is easily seen, of the thirteenth century, when that great conflict was being carried on between the Emperors and the Church. O my brethren, let us take care that the same may be said of us. The times we live in are very sad ones, both for faith and for the Church; for, after all, faith and the Church are identical. The powers of hell have risen up against her; we know that they will not prevail, for God's word is infallible. 'The Church,' says St. Hilary, 'has this peculiarity, that when she is persecuted, she flourishes; when she is oppressed, she grows stronger; when she is despised, she increases; when she is assailed, she conquers; and *then* is she strongest when she appears overcome.' But, in the mean time, the harm done by her enemies is incalculable; the perils of seduction and perversion are extreme, especially for ecclesiastics and religious. And therefore the more desperate the struggle, the more necessary it is for us to draw closer and closer to that infallible mistress of truth, to listen to her doctrine, to fulfil her commands, and to govern ourselves and those under our care by her laws. If we do not wish to suffer shipwreck on the stormy sea of the world, let us enter into this ark of safety; if we wish to find our way through the darkness and mists of ignorance and error, let us keep our eyes fixed upon this luminous beacon; if, in short, we desire to arrive safely at the harbour of eternal life, let *us never lose sight* of this polar star. And if any one

should tempt us astray—if the flattery of the world should strive to corrupt us—if any one, no matter who, should try to persuade us to do otherwise, let us answer him boldly that we are the children and the followers of St. Francis, and therefore we submit entirely to the doctrine of our Holy Mother the Church.

Example.

As we mentioned above, God made known to St. Francis, by a celestial vision, that it would be well for him to ask the Sovereign Pontiff to appoint a Cardinal, who should, in the name and with the authority of the Roman Church, protect the Order against all those who were opposed to it; and it had even then many adversaries. Before acting upon this inspiration, he made a short discourse to his brethren, which we think it well to insert here instead of an example, as it proves clearly the esteem and veneration which he had for the Church. 'The Church of Rome,' he says, 'is the Mother of all the Churches, and the sovereign head of all religious Orders. I shall always have recourse to her and recommend my brethren unto her, that by her authority she may repress the insolence of our enemies, and procure for the true children of God full and perfect liberty to advance peaceably in the path of salvation; as, when they are placed under her protection, no enemies will be able to oppose or disquiet them, the children of Belial will no longer find place therein to ravage with impunity the vineyard of the Lord. Our Holy Mother the Church will zealously protect the glory of our poverty. She will not allow the most precious virtue of humility to be obscured by the clouds of pride; by severely punishing all who *create* discord amongst us, she will strengthen

the bond of peace and charity, so that nothing will be able to break it. Under her eye evangelical observance will flourish in its primitive purity; for she will never allow those devout usages, which diffuse the sweet and refreshing odour of Christ around us, to be neglected even for a time. Let my children, then, be grateful to their Mother for the favours and help which they receive from her; let them remain prostrate at her feet with profound reverence, and be always inviolably attached to her.'

MAXIM OF THE SAINT.

'Let my brethren be always faithful and submissive to the superiors and priests of our Holy Mother the Church.'

PRAYER.

O God, who, out of Thy great goodness and mercy, hast conferred upon us the grace of being born in the bosom of Thy beloved spouse the Church, and hast numbered us amongst her most beloved children, grant that until death we may remain ever docile and obedient to her laws. Remove far from us, we beseech Thee, all that might in any way lessen our love towards her, or the respect and esteem which we owe to her. Give us grace and strength to enable us (each in the different sphere appointed us by obedience, and in the measure proportioned to our condition in life) to win children and subjects to her, to increase her glory and her honour, to celebrate her victories and her triumph. May we, by being docile and obedient children to the Church militant on earth, deserve to be admitted into the number of her children who are gloriously triumphing in heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, &c., as on first day, page 7.

FIFTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as at page 1.

Meditation.

on the firm hope of st. francis.

First Point.—Hope is the source from which have sprung and still spring all the great and noble actions which have ever been performed by men, even those that had merely an earthly object. The hope of a plentiful harvest animates the farmer to labour in his field early and late, regardless of the heat of the sun or the cold of the wintry blasts. The hope of acquiring riches induces the merchant to expose his life in long journeys by sea and land, and to undertake many arduous duties naturally distasteful to him. The hope of becoming wise and learned, and thus obtaining the esteem of men, causes the student to pore night and day over his books, and to deny himself the most innocent amusements, and even the repose of sleep. The hope of acquiring glory and of being thought a hero encourages the soldier to expose his life cheerfully on the field of battle. If then, my brethren, the hope of a fleeting earthly good has such power over the heart of man, how much more efficacious will this hope be when it acts upon the heart of one who, knowing himself to be a pilgrim upon earth, aspires only to heaven, his true country, and strives to acquire the graces necessary to the attainment of this happiness, which graces he knows he will receive by the infallible promise of God Himself! Then indeed nothing can stop him or keep him back. He may be poor and miserable. What matter? He has laid up riches and treasures *in heaven*, where 'neither the rust nor moth

doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.' He may be tormented with temptations and interior afflictions; but he will not lose courage for that, because he knows most certainly that God will never allow any one to be tempted above his strength; and that, on the other hand, 'Blessed is the man who suffereth temptation, for when he has been tried he shall receive the crown of life.' He may be calumniated and persecuted, and he may feel it indeed keenly; but he will not complain or despond, because he knows that those are blessed 'who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Whoever has a firm and lively hope in God triumphs over all the misfortunes of this life, and has, whilst yet upon earth, a foretaste of the pure and perfect happiness in heaven, provided he labour strenuously to obtain those eternal goods to which he aspires; for, as St. Gregory tells us, 'hope without good works is not hope, but presumption.'

Second Point.—The wonderful things which Francis performed for the honour and glory of God with such slender means prove the greatness and firmness of his hope. Upon what foundation did he build up his First Order, which he knew by divine inspiration was to increase rapidly and spread throughout the world? Upon the most perfect poverty—that is to say, upon nothing; since he forbids his brethren to have lands, or houses, or money. In order to provide themselves with the necessaries of life he commanded them to beg from door to door, asking alms for the love of God; and he would often repeat to them the words of the Holy Ghost: 'Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will provide for you.' And although this manner of *life was strange*, and until then unknown in the world—

although it seemed impracticable, even to the Sovereign Pontiff—still St. Francis succeeded so wonderfully that ten years after the foundation of the Order there were more than eight thousand religious; yet the necessaries of life have never been known to fail the Friars Minor. He determined to renew the face of the earth through his own preaching and that of his children, and what means did he adopt to effect his purpose? He sends his children as Jesus Christ sent His Apostles, two and two, in the name of God, deprived of everything, barefooted, poorly and meanly clad; for the most part simple and ignorant men, who did not even know where they were going; and he tells them not to be anxious about what they are to say, because God will put the right words into their mouths; but they were to take care to preach more by their good example than by their words. In a few years we may truly say the face of the earth was renewed, by the numbers of infidels that were converted, by the reformation of morals, and the reawakening of faith and charity amongst Catholic nations. Next, he founded the Second Order, which he called of 'Poor Ladies.' Surely he allowed them to possess something, since he obliged them to keep enclosure, and also because it did not seem suitable for women to be seen begging in the streets? On the contrary, he commanded them to be satisfied with the voluntary contributions of benefactors, and with what they could earn for themselves by honest work. This seemed so impossible to the Sovereign Pontiff that he wished to dispense them from it, but Clare, their mother, humbly refused the dispensation. Notwithstanding this, the Order spread rapidly over Italy, throughout Europe—even over the world. These facts alone *demonstrate* clearly that Francis's faith in the

divine promises was unlimited, we might almost say was infinite; just as the power and mercy of God in whom he trusted are unlimited and infinite.

Third Point.—O my brethren, if we desire earnestly to accomplish something for the glory of God, for the good of our own souls, for the interest of the Order to which we belong, and for the salvation of our neighbour, let us be careful not to trust in ourselves, for we are weak and full of miseries and imperfections; let us not trust in men, for they are frail and weak like ourselves; but let us, following the example of our illustrious patriarch, place all our trust and confidence in God alone, who is omnipotent in His works, infallible in His promises; who has declared Himself our protector in this life, and our recompense in the world to come; and who assures us by the mouth of St. Paul that our hope shall not be confounded. In all our troubles, in temptations, in our spiritual and temporal wants, in trials and misfortunes, no matter how bitter they may appear, let us repeat with the above-mentioned Apostle, 'Of myself I can do nothing, weak and miserable as I am; but "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."' And, as our seraphic Father tells us, 'let the remembrance of the graces we have already received strengthen our hope for the future. If it seems to us that until now we have received but little, God, who is infinitely liberal, will add still greater things, if only we remain faithful to Him.' But let us be careful also that our hope does not degenerate into presumption, expecting God to do everything, whilst we do nothing; for St. Augustin says, 'If He created us without us, He will not save us without us.' He has promised us all the graces necessary for our salvation, *and He will* most certainly give them to us; but

He wishes us to ask for them constantly. If, then, our hope be of this kind, it will indeed be our consolation in tribulation, our support in labour, our solace in grief, and we shall find in it a foretaste of the bliss which awaits us in heaven.

EXAMPLE.

In order the better to realise the confidence which St. Francis had in God, and how God rewarded him for it a thousandfold, we will relate a fact which stands alone and unequalled in Church history. In the year 1219, at the feast of Pentecost, St. Francis convoked a general chapter at St. Mary of Angels, near to Assisi, in order to ascertain what had been the fruits of the preaching of his brethren, who had been labouring for ten years to convert the world. At the command of the holy patriarch some religious came from each convent, and when they met at the place assigned, behold more than 5000 of all nations who had enlisted under the standard of the 'poor one of Assisi.' These religious were divided into various bands and companies, under huts of straw and matting, on account of which the chapter was called the 'Chapter of Mats;' they exercised themselves in prayer, chanting psalms, singing hymns, meditating on the Passion of Christ, and conversing of heavenly things. All present were quiet, silent, humble, filled with desires of perfection; they slept either upon the bare ground or upon straw and the branches of trees. And Francis, like a watchful captain, traversed his camp, encouraging and animating all to fresh fervour, and to the love of God and observance of their Rule, although they were already most fervent and exact. He spoke to them for long together on the nothingness of this world and the greatness of heaven, and on confidence in God. Amongst other things, he said, 'I re-

commend to you above all, nay, I strictly command you, not to be anxious about what concerns your food, clothing, or lodging; for Jesus Christ has bound Himself to provide both you and me with all that is necessary, if on our part we devote ourselves faithfully to His love and service.' His worthy companion, however, the glorious patriarch St. Dominic, who was present at the time, and who heard this discourse, considering the difficulty of providing for the wants of this immense family, was tempted to think his friend indiscreet, and mentioned this thought to him. But Francis, confiding entirely in God, had no anxiety, and answered, 'Wait and see how well my children are provided for.' In fact, carts, mules, horses, and men from all Umbria, especially from Perugia, Spello, Spoleto, and Assisi, flocked into the plain of our Lady of Angels, bringing every sort of food—vegetables, game, fruit, bread, wine—and not only food, but everything necessary for their service, as knives, forks, glasses, plates, dishes, &c. And all, even high prelates and great knights, who had come to witness this wondrous sight, considered it an honour to wait upon these humble friars, blessing God for His mercy and love. St. Dominic, amazed at the faith and confidence of Francis, threw himself at his feet, and begged him to forgive the rash judgment he had formed of him.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Place all your hope in the Lord; He will guide you securely, and help you in all your wants.'

Prayer.

O Lord, we are weak infirm creatures, incapable of *conceiving* even a good thought without Thy aid, and

what is worse, we are full of miseries and sins, and inclined by our natural depravity to commit the greatest crimes; but still we hope with Thy grace to serve Thee faithfully on earth and enjoy Thee for ever in heaven. We hope it, because Thou camest to heal those that are sick, and not those who are whole. Thou willest not the death of a sinner, but that he may be converted and live. Thou dost not wish any to perish, but that all should be saved. Confiding therefore in Thy promises, and trusting to the infinite merits of Thy most bitter passion and death, we can do all things, although in ourselves we are weakness itself. We beseech Thee to strengthen our hope and render it efficacious, and we beg Thee to preserve us from presumption, which is as deadly a sin as despair.

Five Paters, Aves, &c., as page 7.

SIXTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as on first day, page 1.

Meditation.

on st. francis's perfect conformity to the divine will.

First Point.—One of the things which our Divine Master has taught us, as being most necessary and most advantageous to the soul, is the frequent repetition of this prayer, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' We should be guilty of outraging the goodness and mercy of God if we were to doubt that what He wills, whether in the order of nature or of grace, is always the best for us. Can we, on the other hand,

assert, without being guilty of great pride and presumption, that our will is always well regulated, guided as it so often is by a weak and limited intellect and influenced by unsubdued passions? What, then, can be more reasonable or more salutary for us than to do in all things the will of God? But we must understand, my brethren, that this does not mean merely a full and perfect obedience to His commands, although that is most important; but it means also uniting our will to His, not willing or desiring anything but what is pleasing to Him; and this not only in prosperity, but in adversity, kissing with humble and patient resignation the hand which strikes, knowing that He corrects and chastises those whom He loves. This is the great means of becoming pleasing to God, and of advancing with giant steps in the path of holiness and perfection. Therefore the greatest ascetic of our days has said that sanctity consists simply in these two things: in knowing the will of God, and in doing it when we know it. This is the secret by which holy souls enjoy a heavenly sweetness and consolation in the midst of their greatest trials and tribulations. This is why holy Job, seated on a dunghill, devoured by worms, deprived of all things, and abandoned by all, breaks out into this beautiful expression of resignation: 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' This is why we are told by the Holy Ghost that when Tobias had become blind, and had been reduced to misery through his works of charity, he was not disturbed, but remained firm in the service of God, and 'gave thanks all the days of his life.' But still more, Jesus Christ Himself, not content with exhorting us to repeat this prayer, repeated *it with the* greatest earnestness, when, plunged in an

ocean of agony and grief, He turned to His Heavenly Father, saying, 'Father, not My will, but Thine, be done.' And He also said, 'I came down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.'

Second Point.—We will now briefly observe how Francis, following the example of the saints, and still more of Christ Himself, whom he was chosen to imitate in all things, united his will constantly to the divine will. Whilst he was yet in the world, having misunderstood a celestial warning which had been sent him in sleep, he started for the kingdom of Naples, in order to engage in a war which was raging there, in the hope of acquiring earthly glory. But Jesus, who had chosen him to fight under His standard, stopped him on the road, as He had Paul on his way to Damascus, and made him understand that the vision he had seen had a different signification. Francis then exclaimed, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Thus at the very commencement of his conversion he placed himself entirely in the hands of God, nor did he ever retract his offering. In order to confirm himself still more in his resolution he used to repeat every day the following fervent prayer: 'O Almighty and eternal God, most just and most merciful, grant us miserable creatures this grace, that we may always do what we know to be Thy will, and always will what Thou willest; that, thus purified and enlightened interiorly, and inflamed with the fire of the Holy Ghost, we may follow in the footsteps of Thy beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and thus arrive at the possession of Thee, who livest and reignest God, world without end. Amen.' At the very outset of his religious life, being in *doubt* whether he and his companions were to

spend their lives in solitude and contemplation, or exercise missionary and apostolic functions, he prayed to know the divine will, and, having received the answer from God that they were to save souls by preaching, they immediately began to preach.

He still, however, doubted whether he at least might not give himself to prayer, to which he felt strongly drawn, or whether he should join his disciples in their ministry. Not content this time with his own prayers, he also asked those of Clare and of Silvester, two great servants of God; and having learnt through them that it was God's will that he should join his brethren in preaching, he found himself filled with great fervour. 'Let us go,' he exclaimed, 'in the name of the Lord;' and he set out without delay. He longed most ardently for martyrdom, and went three times into infidel countries in hopes of obtaining it; but God made known to him that he was to be a martyr indeed, but that his martyrdom was to be of a new and unheard-of kind. He at once returned to Italy, and there awaited, in great submission and peace of mind, the fulfilment of God's holy will. The great things he effected for the glory of God, his constant tranquillity and cheerfulness, never complaining or repining, but always rejoicing, prove far better than the few instances we have recorded that in all his thoughts and actions he strove only to fulfil the will of God, and to unite himself perfectly to His good pleasure.

Third Point.—We, on the contrary, my brethren, do not succeed in many things which seem good to us, and perhaps are so in reality; we are surprised and disturbed by our failures, and vainly search for their cause. If, however, we look at things impartially, we

shall find that we have been seeking ourselves throughout, and not God; that God has hardly any share in our actions, even when they are conformed to His holy will, and that they are often in direct opposition to it. Then if a misfortune threaten us, if temptations assail us, if we have to suffer some heaviness of mind or heart, we at once lose courage, become anxious and disquieted, lament and complain as if we had not deserved such sufferings. This proves that we think too much of ourselves; that we are not fully resigned to the divine will. We should like things to turn out according to our wishes; we wish always to enjoy sweetness and consolation from God; but this is a great mistake, caused by our self-love; and woe to us if God were to grant us what we asked! Therefore our seraphic Father thus lovingly encouraged a religious who came to him for consolation: 'My son, no one can be considered a true servant of God until he has passed through temptations and tribulation.' Let us, then, convince ourselves once for all of this great truth, that our real happiness consists in always doing the will of God. Many times a day we say with our lips, 'Thy will be done;' let us for the future say it also with our hearts, and let us trust ourselves wholly to His guidance, who so well knows our wants and our weakness. But perhaps you will say, How are we to know the will of God? O, it is very easy, my brethren, especially for us, because besides the Gospel, which is the rule of all Christians, and the holy Rule which we profess, and prayer to which all can have recourse, we have also our superiors and directors. Let us, then, observe our rule, punctually and willingly obey our superiors, and thus we shall be sure of always doing God's will; and if in thus acting we are led astray

the mistake, and therefore the fault, will be imputed to our superiors, who were imprudent or indiscreet. This has always been the maxim of the saints, and it must be ours if we wish to possess the glory which they enjoy.

EXAMPLE.

In order to show how perfectly conformed St. Francis was to the divine will, not only in his actions, but also in trials and sufferings with which he was visited by God, we will relate the following incident: Some time after the holy man had received the sacred Stigmata, which caused him constant suffering, he was attacked by a violent burning pain in his eyes, brought on by his constant weeping, and also many other infirmities, so that it seemed to one of his companions as if God were dealing too harshly with His faithful servant. Therefore one day he thus spoke to St. Francis: 'Beg of God, my Father, to treat you more tenderly, for it seems to me that His hand is too heavy upon you.' Francis, however, who had a very different idea of suffering, and who called his infirmities graces and blessings, seemed to consider these words as blasphemous, and, turning to the religious, he exclaimed with horror, 'If I did not know thy simplicity and the uprightness of thy intention, I would drive thee from my presence and forbid thee ever to approach me again, because thou hast been so presumptuous as to complain to God, and call Him to account for what He does to me.' And then with great fervour, regardless of his weakness, he threw himself out of bed on to the floor with such force as to shake and bruise his already infirm body, and, kissing the ground, he exclaimed, 'I thank Thee, O Lord, for the pains and *infirmities which* I suffer, and I beseech Thee, if it be

Thy good pleasure, to add to them a hundredfold, for all my happiness consists in the accomplishment of Thy holy will, which I entreat Thee to fulfil in me notwithstanding my weakness.' Thus grace had transformed his natural dread of suffering into so strong a love of the will of God that the most excruciating pains became delightful to him, because by them he fulfilled the divine will.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Now we have left the world nothing remains for us to do but diligently to fulfil the divine will and pleasure.'

Prayer.

O good and merciful Jesus, who hast said, 'Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,' grant that we may always fulfil this Thy holy will. We are, indeed, willing enough to do so as long as our desires are satisfied, that we succeed in our undertakings and enjoy health and prosperity; but grant us to understand that the truly happy are the poor, the afflicted, those who mourn, who suffer persecution for justice' sake, who are calumniated and falsely accused, that so we may cheerfully and with alacrity fulfil the will of Thy Father in adversity as in prosperity, and thus be found worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven, to praise and bless Thee for evermore. Amen.

Pater, Ave, &c., as page 7.

SEVENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

ON THE ARDENT LOVE OF FRANCIS FOR GOD.

First Point.—The first and greatest of all the commandments of God, whether in the Old or New Law, is this: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul, with all thy mind and all thy strength;' which means, as St. Augustin explains it, with thy whole self, so that thy entire being tend by love to God. 'But,' exclaims the seraphic Saint of Carmel, 'why was it necessary, O my God, for Thee to make it an obligation for us to love Thee? Surely Thy own infinite perfections would of themselves attract our love; and the love which Thou hast shown us would make it impossible for us not to love Thee in return. Is it possible that any one should exist who loves Thee not?' And the saint was right in so speaking, my brethren, for certainly we should find no difficulty in loving God if we were as holy as she was. We love, either because the object of our affections is beautiful and lovable in itself, or because it is kind and amiable towards us. The first is called the love of benevolence; the second, the love of gratitude or interest; and it is a true love, although less perfect than the first. Who, then, deserves our love more than God, either for His own perfections or for the love He has shown us? In Him we find infinite power, wisdom, beauty, goodness, greatness, mercy, and holiness, far surpassing our noblest conceptions or most exalted imaginings; in a word, He is the only good, the supreme good, the source of all our good. If we

find any goodness or beauty in creatures, it is but a shadow of the infinite perfections of that God from whom they derive all their excellence. And as regards ourselves, God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour, our reward exceeding great, and our all; so that if He were to withdraw His hand for one moment we should instantly return to nothingness. All the creatures by which we are surrounded preach to us in their own language the goodness and mercy of God. Since man, then, by his very nature, is obliged to desire and crave after good, he ought constantly to tend to God, the Sovereign Good, with his whole heart and mind, as the one object which will render him perfectly happy and blessed. Away from Him he will find only misery and unhappiness. As St. Augustin so truly exclaims, 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord; and our hearts cannot rest until they rest in Thee.' But, my brethren, this is, unfortunately, only an attraction, not a necessity; and original sin has so blinded and warped the intellect of man, that he often sacrifices true happiness for deceitful joys; infinite good for finite; the Creator for the creature. God, therefore, compassionating our weakness, commands us to love Him under pain of eternal damnation if we refuse.

Second Point.—'Who,' says St. Bonaventure, 'can tell, what words can we find to express, the love with which Francis loved his God?—he who after his conversion seemed not to belong any more to earth, but to have become already an inhabitant of heaven. He, having his understanding enlightened with heavenly light, and his will perfected by grace, went straight to his God, as the flame rises upwards and the body gravitates to its centre. Divine love penetrated his soul, as

fire does the burning coal. Hearing him speak of divine love was enough to move and inflame the hearts of all. In order to excite himself still more to the love of his God he made use of creatures, as of so many mirrors, in which he beheld the supreme wisdom and infinite beauty of their Creator; as so many steps, by the help of which he could ascend to the object of his love; as so many streams, in which he recognised the beauty of the fountain-head; as so many beautiful strains of music, which revealed to him the harmony of celestial things; therefore he would invite all creatures to praise and love their Maker.' He had nothing, as he said, to offer to God, except his body and soul, as he had renounced all he possessed and all he ever might have possessed on earth; therefore he constantly sacrificed his body by rigorous fasting and other penances; and his soul, by the vehemence of his ardent desires, thirsting to die for the love of that God who had died for love of us. He endeavoured to communicate this burning charity to all—it was the constant theme of his discourses; the motive which he oftenest proposed to his religious, to animate them to fervour in suffering and in the practice of virtue. This was the cause of those raptures and wonderful ecstasies which befell him. This was what obtained for him those heavenly consolations, those visits from Jesus and Mary; and this divine love was, according to St. Francis of Sales, the cause of his death. This was the origin of those amorous canticles, so full of celestial poetry, especially those he composed after having been wounded exteriorly by his Divine Lover. It was this love which inspired those impassioned words which broke forth from his soul, all filled and penetrated with love, as, for instance, 'My God and my All,' 'O, the

blindness of men, who will not love the fount and source of Love? Finally, this ardent love obtained for him the title of Seraphic, which was afterwards applied to his Order.

Third Point.—We, O my brethren, we are children and devoted followers of this seraphic Father; we may well rejoice thereat, we may well thank God for it, for we have good reason to be proud of our Father; but let us be careful to imitate him in his love for God. I do not mean that we can ever hope to imitate his most ardent and intensely supreme love, as it is called by theologians, for that grace is given to very few on earth; but, in a lesser and more humble degree, let us at least esteem God above all created things, and fear sin more than any evil that can befall us in this life. Let us ask ourselves how we stand before God in this respect. What answer does our conscience make us? What does our heart reply? Does not the acknowledgment fill us with confusion? Our heart is at least cold, if it be not utterly frozen, towards God. But if we have no charity, what are we, O my brethren, in the sight of God? Let us hear the answer of St. Paul: 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' So it is, my brethren. This is what St. Francis said once, almost word for word, to Brother Leo, when he was exciting him to divine love. Let us, then, rouse our-

selves at last from this lethargy in which our souls are sunk, lest it should be a sleep of death for us, for the Holy Ghost warns us, by the mouth of the Apostle St. John, 'he who has not charity is dead.' And if our weakness makes it impossible for us to love God with a perfect love—the love of benevolence—let us at least love Him with the love of gratitude and preference, for that is in the power of all. Let us think over the innumerable graces and blessings which God has bestowed upon us, especially the great privilege by which He has called us to follow so noble a Father, and the promise which He has given us that He Himself will be our reward and perfect happiness in heaven. Surely, unless our hearts are hard as stone, they will not refuse to love so good a God, who has loved us so much, who loves us still, and who will love us for all eternity!

Example.

Amongst the many instances which we might quote, to demonstrate the ardent love with which St. Francis loved his God, the following is not the least interesting. St. Clare, his first-born daughter in Christ, had never been out of the monastery of St. Damian since the day when her holy Father placed her there, after he had consecrated her to God in the church of our Lady of Angels. She had, however, a great desire to see this church once more, and to speak with the seraphic Father. Many times she had asked him, through others, to grant her this consolation, but he always refused. At last, however, overcome by the entreaties of his brethren, he consented. On the appointed day he sent some of his religious to St. Damian's to fetch St. Clare, who came accompanied by one of her Sisters. *After she had* prayed in the church and visited the

convent, she was, to her great joy, allowed to join the holy Father at his poor dinner. Before beginning their repast, however, Francis, as a kind of first course, began to speak of what he loved best, and of what he knew St. Clare loved best, namely, God and heavenly things. But he spoke with such eloquence and fervour that, the love of God increasing in his heart and in the heart of his faithful disciple, they were both ravished in ecstasy and remained immovable, with their hands and eyes raised to heaven. The people outside, both in Assisi and in the country round, beheld a marvellous sight: the convent, the church, and the wood adjoining appeared in flames, so that they hastened from all sides to extinguish the fire. But when they arrived they found no signs of fire, and entering into the convent they beheld the two saints ravished in ecstasy, by which they understood that the flames they had seen were not of earth, but represented the divine love with which the Holy Ghost had replenished their hearts. After some time Francis and Clare returned to themselves, having been so satiated with heavenly food as to have lost all taste for the corporal nourishment prepared for them; so, without touching any food, Francis retired to his cell and Clare to her monastery, which she never afterwards quitted.

Maxim of the Saint.

'How happy and blessed are they who love God!'

Prayer.

We confess, O Lord, that we have been most ungrateful, and forgetful of Thee in times past; that we have not returned Thee love for love; but for the future, with Thy help, we mean to love Thee, and to love Thee

as Thou deservest, and as Thou willest us to love Thee, namely, with our whole heart, our whole soul, with all our mind and all our strength; and we are confident that 'neither tribulation, nor distress, nor hunger, nor nakedness, nor danger, nor persecution, nor the sword shall separate us from Thy love.' We now beg of Thee, in the words of our seraphic Father, to grant that 'the sweet violence of Thy love may separate us from all creatures, and may take entire possession of our hearts, that so we may die for the love of Thy love, who didst deign to die for the love of our love.' Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c., as page 7.

EIGHTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as above, page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE ARDENT ZEAL OF ST. FRANCIS FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS.

First Point.—Christ Himself has declared that the precept of loving our neighbour as ourselves is second only to the love of God, and is like to it in excellence and necessity; and He seems to be even more urgent in enforcing it. He calls it a new commandment, as though He would say: In past times, My children, on account of the blindness and malice of men's hearts, true charity was very rare amongst them; but My will is that you love one another, as I have loved you. He calls it His own commandment, because it was the aim of His whole life; because He wishes us to esteem and value it very highly, and to observe it faithfully, for

love of Him. He wishes that His disciples should for the future be recognised by the observance of this very commandment: 'By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.' He threatens those who violate it with hell-fire; and declares that He will not receive offerings or sacrifices from any one who is not reconciled to his brother. But why is our Lord solicitous about the fulfilment of this precept? If we consider the nature of true love, the reason will be obvious. True charity to our neighbour consists in desiring and procuring as much as lies in our power—his eternal salvation. The providence of God directs all things to this end. For this end, impelled by His eternal love, He created us; for this did His Divine Son become man, and live on earth, poor and unknown, spending the last years of His life in toil and labour, and at length dying in ignominy upon a cross. For our salvation He instituted the Sacraments, founded His Church, and sent His Apostles to teach all men. In our preservation, in the many blessings and favours He bestows upon us, He has our salvation alone in view. And is it not for our salvation that the world yet exists? This is why our Lord so urges this commandment upon us. This is why the saints, instructed in the school of their loving Redeemer, burned with the desire of saving souls, and laboured unceasingly for them. The Apostle of love, St. John, never wearied of inculcating mutual charity to his disciples, because whoever fulfils this commandment insures his salvation. St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, desired to be anathema for his brethren, being persuaded that charity was the perfection of the law. And our seraphic Father gives us a perfect example of this virtue.

Second Point.—What end had St. Francis in view during all those dangerous and wearisome journeys which he undertook, not merely throughout Italy, but also into France, Spain, Illyria, Palestine, and Egypt; preaching, instructing, and setting forth a wonderful example of penance and virtue? Was it not the glory of God, and the salvation of souls? This was his aim in instituting his three Orders, and especially his First Order, in which truly apostolic men were to be formed, who by their preaching, but still more by the holiness of their lives, were to follow in his footsteps, saving souls from the snares of the devil, and leading them to Christ. What did he ask of God in those fervent prayers, which he often prolonged through the hours of the night? The conversion of sinners, the salvation of souls. He often said that 'nothing was to be preferred to the salvation of souls, because the Son of God died for them upon the cross.' Thus when he met any one whom he knew to be defiled with sin, he would weep over that soul as a mother over her only child. His charity was ingenious in discovering means by which he could relieve the corporal wants of sinners, in order thereby to win their souls to God. Like another St. Paul, he made himself all to all, in order to save all; because in each one he beheld the likeness of the Creator, the soul washed in the Precious Blood of the Redeemer, and destined to eternal glory. And when near the close of his life, weakened by infirmity, and suffering intense pain from the wounds of his sacred Stigmata, still, says his great panegyrist, 'it was a wonderful and admirable sight to behold this man, entirely consumed by the love of Christ, seated upon a poor ass, and thus taken from place to place, preach*ing to the people,* encouraging them to do penance,

exciting them to the love of Christ: it appeared to be really Christ Himself, who, thus nailed to the cross, was borne about here and there, speaking from the sacred tree,' thirsting only for souls.

Third Point.—St. Dionysius says that 'to procure the salvation of souls is the most divine of all divine works.' Therefore, O my brethren, there is not one of us who can, from any cause whatsoever, consider himself exempted from so sacred a duty. The title of Christian, which we bear, in itself obliges us to procure, by every possible means, the salvation of our neighbour. Many of us are priests, and as such are still more bound thereunto, in virtue of that office; and all are Franciscan religious, and therefore obliged by their Rule to devote themselves, not exclusively to contemplation, or teaching, or preaching, or giving missions, or nursing the sick, but to all these things, according to time, place, and particular circumstances, unless they are lawfully prevented from doing so. We may be incapable of teaching, preaching, or giving missions; but we shall find many other works of charity in which to employ ourselves. Possibly our weak health may be a hindrance to our undertaking great labours or much active work; but we can edify others by our religious or domestic virtues, and by our fervent and assiduous prayers we can obtain the salvation of many souls. Some may say that the present time is not favourable for apostolic labours. This is certainly false, because a son of St. Francis, if he possess the true spirit of his seraphic Father, is suited to all times and places —perhaps more so than any other religious. He may, indeed, have to meet with scorn and insult; but has not that been the lot of all the true followers of Christ? O, what a terrible misfortune it would be for us if even

one soul, for whom Jesus Christ has given His Blood and His life, were lost through our neglect and sloth! Let us, then, set to work, my brethren, each one in his own sphere and according to his strength; for the harvest is great and the labourers are few. St. Paul might have been speaking to us when he says, 'If a man be overtaken in any fault, you who are spiritual instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ. In doing good let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore whilst we have time let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.'

Example.

The following fact proves how earnestly Francis desired the salvation of souls, and also how many were saved by his endeavours.

In the year 1216 he went to Rome, where St. Dominic then was; but these two holy men were as yet unknown to each other. One day, whilst they were praying in a church (generally supposed to be St. Peter's), our Lord appeared to each of them seated at the right hand of His Father, with an angry countenance, holding in His hand three arrows, with which He was about to exterminate the proud, the avaricious, and the sensual who filled the world. Our Blessed Lady then appeared, and prostrating herself before Him, implored His mercy in behalf of sinners; and presenting Francis and Dominic to Him, she said that these two devoted children of hers would apply a remedy to these *great* evils, as by their zeal and charity they would re*form the morals* of Christians, and reëstablish fervour

and piety amongst them. And Jesus Christ accepted her offering, and was pleased to withhold His terrible chastisements.

The next day the two saints met in the same church, and, recognising each other at first sight, hastened mutually to embrace, and remained some time locked in each other's arms without uttering a word. Dominic was the first to speak. 'You,' said he to Francis—'you are my brother and my companion. Together we will labour for the glory of God and the good of souls, and none shall be able to prevail against us.' We all know what great works these two champions of Christ effected for the salvation of souls.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Be assured that to labour for the salvation of souls is one of the things most pleasing to God.'

Prayer.

O Divine Redeemer, who to save mankind didst suffer most bitter torments and ignominies, didst die upon the cross and shed the last drop of Thy Precious Blood, grant that in future we may labour with all our strength, according to our ability and station in life, to obtain the salvation of souls. And since Thou hast said that it would profit us nothing to gain the whole world if we lose our own soul, we beg of Thee to grant us all the graces necessary for our salvation. Save us, O good Jesus—save us, who hast purchased us at so great a price! Pardon the many faults with which we have stained our baptismal robe; grant that we may realise the beauty of our soul, and value it above everything *in this world*, that, at the hour of our death, it

may return glorified to Thee, who art its divine origin. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

NINTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE TENDER LOVE OF ST. FRANCIS FOR THE POOR AND AFFLICTED.

First Point.—Speaking one day of the rewards prepared in heaven for works of mercy, our Divine Lord said, amongst other things, that the King of heaven and earth would speak thus to all who had had compassion on the poor and relieved their necessities: 'As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it unto Me.' O most amiable Heart of Jesus! is it possible that Christians are to consider the poor and miserable objects of charity not only as their own brethren, but even as Thine—those unfortunate beings whom the proud and infidel world regarded, with scorn and disgust, as of an inferior nature to their own? Is it possible that the crust of bread given to the poor man, merely to save him from starvation and get rid of his loathsome presence, shall for the future be as precious as though it were given to Thee? Wilt Thou consider what is done to him as done to Thyself? So it is, my brethren. And in order still more to convince ourselves of the love which the Son of God has for the poor, let us call to mind His life. He was born of Mary, a poor Virgin who had barely the necessaries of life. His foster-father was a poor carpenter. The poor

were the first to adore Him in the stable at Bethlehem; His Apostles were chosen from amongst the poor; His conversation was with the poor; and He died so poor as to be indebted to the piety of others for the linen cloths which wrapped His sacred Body for interment. Thus it is, my brethren, that all things which had been corrupted and thrown into disorder by sin were to be, according to the great maxim of St. Paul, restored by Christ. All classes of persons—the freedman and the slave, the poor who had been degraded and dethroned by the pride and sensuality of the Gentiles—were to be reinstated in their dignity by our Divine Saviour. Is it possible that Christians should find it hard to imitate our Lord, and should refuse to compassionate and assist the poor to the best of their power, knowing that by so doing they win heaven for themselves? Will any Christian dare to despise, or to refuse attention or kindness to, those whom Christ has called His brethren, and in whose persons He wishes us to see Himself? Such hardness of heart seems impossible. Such a one would be a Christian only in name; he could no longer be considered as a brother of Jesus or an heir of heaven.

Second Point.—Francis, who was sent by God to recall guilty man to the regeneration effected by Christ, was a true copy of his divine model in the love he bore to the poor and afflicted. From his childhood God had inspired him with a lively feeling of compassion for the poor; he always endeavoured to relieve their wants, and he even made a vow never to refuse an alms to any one, especially if asked in God's name. But when our Lord called him to leave the world, and to devote himself entirely to His service, this burning love daily increased in strength, until at length it knew no bounds. St. Bonaventure says that he spared nothing in his en-

deavours to relieve the poor; he gave them everything —cloaks, tunics, sacred vestments, even the ornaments of the altar. One day, when there was nothing left in the convent but one copy of the New Testament, which the religious constantly used, he gave even *that* away to a poor woman, telling her to sell it in order to provide for her necessaries; for, added he, 'I believe that this charity will be more pleasing to God than the reading of this book.' His maxim was, that if anything was given to him, he could only keep it until he found one poorer than himself, and that it would be a great sin in him to do otherwise. Weak and ill as he was, he would often take upon his own shoulders the burdens of the poor whom he met on the road. When he returned from begging, he always divided what he received with any who asked it of him, and he never refused any one so long as a morsel remained. He would often join the beggars in their meals, and cheerfully dine with them in the middle of the street. In short, we may truly say that he devoted himself entirely to the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, assisting and consoling them in the hospitals, in their miserable hovels, or wherever they were to be found. When he was unable to relieve their corporal necessities, he consoled them with kind and loving words, seeing in their persons Christ, who became poor for love of us; and in the afflicted and infirm he saw Christ, who became 'the Man of Sorrows' for our salvation.

Third Point.—If all Christians are bound to relieve the poor, not merely as their fellow-men, but as brethren of Jesus Christ, how much greater is our obligation, who are enrolled in the militia of the 'poor one of Assisi'! Let us not plead poverty as an excuse, and say that, being poor ourselves, we have nothing to give. If we

are truly poor in spirit as well as in name, if we are really satisfied with the necessaries of life, and do not seek superfluities, we shall always find something to spare for those who ask it for the love of God. It certainly belongs more to superiors than to inferiors to judge of the extent to which this virtue may be practised in a community; but still, all and each, if they are really merciful and compassionate towards the poor, can find means of assisting them, for charity is ingenious. And even if we can do nothing to relieve their corporal misery, let us at least wish to do so, and, like our holy Father, let us encourage them by our gentle words, and treat them always as our brethren. We little know the good that this may do. When they see the children of the great patriarch Francis walking barefoot, begging alms, for the love of God, from door to door, they begin to feel that their condition is not so vile and despicable as worldlings would have them believe, since some are found who embrace it voluntarily in order to please God. When they see persons who might have lived in ease and luxury willingly placing themselves under the yoke of poverty, they feel strengthened, encouraged, and better able to bear the burden which Providence has placed upon them. They find consolation in the thought that they have at least some true friends—some who really love them, who do not disdain to associate with them, to take an interest in their affairs, and to help them with their advice. But in doing all this, we must be careful to act always in a Christian and religious spirit, and not from mere philanthropy, as so many do in this semi-pagan age. Even if the poor were to derive equal benefit from this purely human charity, we could never hope to gain any supernatural reward by exercising it.

EXAMPLE.

So numerous are the examples of charity left by our holy Father that it is difficult to choose between them; the following, however, may be specially useful, as it contains some beautiful advice concerning the subject we are considering. One day when the saint was going to preach, a poor sick man begged to be recommended by him to the charity of the audience. The saint was so moved at the sight of his misery that he told his companion, with tears in his eyes, that he felt as much for the poor man as if he himself were suffering his poverty and infirmity. But his companion roughly repulsed the beggar, and in order to mitigate the saint's sorrow he exclaimed, 'Certainly this man does appear miserable if we consider only the exterior; but very likely if we could see into his interior we should find him as rich in desires and as puffed up with pride as any one in the country; for such is frequently the case with these bold and importunate beggars.' Francis severely rebuked him—first, for so harshly repulsing the beggar, and then for rashly judging him—and made him feel that in so doing he had grievously offended God. The religious, kneeling, humbly confessed his fault. 'I will not pardon you,' said Francis, 'unless you take off your habit, and prostrating before that beggar you confess your fault to him, and beg him to forgive you and intercede for you with God.' The humble religious immediately obeyed. Then Francis lovingly embraced him, and said, 'My son, you have sinned not so much against this poor man as against Jesus Christ, because the poor are like so many mirrors, which reflect His poverty and that of His Blessed Mother Mary; therefore whenever you see a poor man you should respect him and humble yourself before

him; remembering that God the Son became poor for love of us, and bore all our infirmities.'

MAXIM OF THE SAINT.

'Whenever, my brother, you meet a poor man, look upon him as a mirror, in which you behold our Lord and His Blessed Mother.'

PRAYER.

Grant us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, a true charity and compassion for the poor and afflicted, whom Thou hast chosen for Thy brethren and friends, and in whose likeness Thou didst appear upon earth. Make us meek and humble, that, not satisfied with calling them our brethren, we may show by our deeds that we consider them as such. Grant them also grace and strength to suffer patiently, and to look upon the trials of the state in which Thou hast placed them or allowed them to be placed as means to help them to gain heaven; may they be truly poor in spirit, for it is only to this interior poverty that Thou hast promised the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE COMPASSIONATE LOVE OF ST. FRANCIS FOR IRRATIONAL CREATURES.

First Point.—The royal prophet in his most sublime canticles never wearies of praising and admiring the

works of creation, as showing forth the wisdom and omnipotence of their Creator. And he is right, my brethren, for in everything—in the grain of sand as in the glorious sun, in the tiny flower as in the lofty cedar, in the invisible insect as in the magnificent lion—the thoughtful mind recognises infinite power drawing them from nothingness, infinite wisdom ruling and governing them, and infinite goodness bestowing blessings upon them. Man also sees and knows that they were created for his use, that in great part, at least, they are subject to him, and that by their mute eloquence they praise and glorify their Creator; and, ravished at the sight of the harmony of the works of God, he breaks forth into a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for so great goodness and wisdom, and feels himself urged, I would almost say forced, to love these creatures, who lead him as by so many steps to the knowledge of his God. How unhappy, on the other hand, are the carnal and earthly minded, who cannot perceive the finger of the Creator in the wonders of nature! And how much worse are those guilty wretches who make use of creatures to satisfy their unruly passions and to offend their Maker! Should they not tremble lest the Supreme Ruler of all, indignant at such base ingratitude, should (as we are told in the book of Wisdom) make use of these same creatures to punish their guilt?

Second Point.—Francis, who made use of creatures truly, as steps by which to rise to his Creator, and as means by which to excite himself to greater fervour in His service, loved them so tenderly that he spoke of them as his brothers and sisters, and was moved to tears if he saw them suffer. Some heretics and light-minded persons have considered this as a weakness in

the saint; but all pious and serious men have looked upon it as a proof of one of the purest, holiest, and most poetical of minds that the Christian religion has ever produced. He loved all creatures, animate and inanimate, but his predilection was for those which symbolised some virtue and suggested some holy thought. Above all he loved lambs, because they reminded him of the Lamb without spot who suffered for our iniquities; and, therefore, whenever he could he would save them from slaughter. Doves also were favourites with him, because pure and chaste souls are compared to these in the Holy Scriptures; and he would try to redeem any which were offered for sale. Larks pleased him much, because their dusky hue reminded him of penance and death; also because these birds only remain for a short time upon the ground, and as soon as they have taken a little food soar again into the sky. 'What an example for us,' would he joyously exclaim, 'teaching us to thank our common Father for the food He gives us, to make use of it only for His greater glory, and to despise this world, and raise our hearts and minds to heaven, where our conversation should be!' The animals on their side, as if endued with reason, loved and served Francis: wolves caressed him and made a compact with him, foxes feared him and ceased their depredations, sheep bleated when they saw him, a falcon on Mount Alvernia marked the time for him to rise; all sorts of birds perched upon his hands and arms, listened to him when he preached, united with him in singing the praises of God, and fluttered joyously at his approach. He extended this love even to the elements, calling the fire his brother. 'When,' to quote the words of the pious and learned Röhrbacher, 'he could no longer contain the love which burned in his breast,

he would traverse the lanes and fields, calling upon the harvest, the vines, the trees, the flowers of the field, the stars in the sky, upon all his brothers and sisters in nature, to unite with him in praising their Creator; and his ardent and ingenuous tenderness, rising step by step even to the sun, inspired him with a magnificent hymn, which may be compared to the canticle of the three Jewish children in the furnace of Babylon.'

Third Point.—We may learn much, my brethren, from this characteristic and poetic feature in the life of our saint. We also should be tender and compassionate towards all, especially living creatures, because those who are kind and gentle to animals are so likewise to their fellow-men, and those who are cruel to the one will be cruel to the other. A pious author well observes that St. Francis, by that compassionate tenderness which made him unwilling to see anything suffer, and caused him even to remove worms from the pathway, for fear they should be crushed, gave a great lesson to Italy, which was in those days the scene of discord, murder, and bloodshed. In the second place, we learn from the example of our holy Father that the more we conquer sin, the sole cause of the rebellion and disobedience of inferior creatures, the more power shall we acquire over them, so as almost to regain the authority which we lost through original sin, as was the case with so many saints, especially St. Francis. But above all we should learn to make a good use of creatures, according to the end for which they were created and placed in subjection to us. 'O man, whosoever thou mayest be,' says our seraphic doctor St. Bonaventure, 'open thine eyes and see, lend thine ears and hearken, let thy lips sound forth the praises of thy Lord, and apply thy mind to understand and real-

ise the presence of God in His creation; praise, love, adore, magnify, and honour Him therein, lest perchance the whole universe rise up against thee. All the earth will rebel against the wicked, but the wise man shall be glorified therein, and shall exclaim with the prophet, "Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings, and in the works of Thy hands I shall rejoice. How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with Thy riches."'

Example.

At the time when St. Francis was living in the city of Gubbio a large wolf appeared in the environs, so terrible and so fierce, that he not only devoured other animals, but made a prey of men, and, as he often approached the town, all the people were in great alarm, and never went out but armed, as if they were going to battle. Notwithstanding these precautions, if any of the inhabitants ever met him alone they were sure to be devoured, as all defence was useless; and, out of fear of the wolf, they did not dare go beyond the city-walls. St. Francis, feeling great compassion for the people of Gubbio, resolved to go and meet the wolf, though all advised him not to do so. Making the holy sign of the cross, and putting all his confidence in God, he went out of the city, taking his Brothers with him; but these fearing to go any farther, St. Francis bent his steps alone towards the spot where the wolf was known to be, and many people followed at a distance and witnessed the miracle. The wolf, seeing all this multitude, ran towards St. Francis with his jaws wide open. As he approached, the saint, making the sign of the cross, cried out, 'Come hither, brother wolf; I command thee, in the name of Christ,

neither to harm me nor anybody else.' And, O miracle! no sooner had St. Francis made the sign of the cross than the terrible wolf closed his jaws, stopped running, and, coming up to St. Francis, lay down at his feet as meekly as a lamb. And the saint thus addressed him: 'Brother wolf, thou hast done much evil in this land, destroying and killing the creatures of God without His permission; thou hast not only destroyed animals, but thou hast dared devour even men, made after the image of God, for which thing thou art worthy of being hung like a robber and a murderer. All men cry against thee, the dogs pursue thee, and all the inhabitants of this city are thy enemies; but I will, O brother wolf, make peace between them and thee, so that thou no more offend them, and they forgive thee all thy past offences, and neither men nor dogs pursue thee any more.' Having listened to these words, the wolf bowed his head, and, by the movements of his body, of his tail, and of his eyes, made signs that he agreed to what St. Francis said. And St. Francis added, 'As thou art willing to make this peace, I promise thee that thou shalt be fed every day by the inhabitants of this land as long as thou shalt live among them; thou shalt no longer suffer hunger, as it is hunger which has made thee do so much evil. But if I obtain all this for thee thou must promise, on thy side, never again to attack any animal or any human being. Dost thou make this promise?' And the wolf, bowing his head, made a sign that he consented. St. Francis said again, 'Brother wolf, wilt thou pledge thy faith that I may trust to this thy promise?' and St. Francis put out his hand to receive the pledge of the wolf. The latter lifted up his right paw and placed it in the hand of St. Francis. And St. Francis, addressing him again, said,

'Brother wolf, I command thee, in the name of Christ, to follow me immediately, that we may go together to ratify this peace which we have concluded in the name of God.' And the wolf, obeying him, walked by his side as meekly as a lamb, to the great astonishment of all the people, who flocked to the market-place, where St. Francis got up to preach, saying, amongst other things, 'how for our sins God permits such calamities, and how much more dangerous are the flames of hell, which last for ever, than the rage of the wolf, which can only kill the body; and how much we ought to dread the jaws of hell, if the jaws of so small an animal as a wolf can make a whole city tremble through fear.' After this St. Francis said, 'Listen, my brethren: the wolf has promised and pledged his faith, that he consents to make peace with you all, and no more offend you in aught; and you must promise to give him each day his necessary food, to which, if you consent, I promise in his name that he will most faithfully observe the compact.' Then all the people promised to feed the wolf to the end of his days. And St. Francis said again, 'And thou, brother wolf, dost thou promise to keep the compact, and never again to offend either man or beast or any other creature?' And the wolf knelt down, bowed his head, and, by the motions of his tail and of his ears, endeavoured to show that he was willing, as far as was in his power, to hold to the compact. And St. Francis continued:

'Brother wolf, as thou gavest me a pledge of this thy promise when we were outside the town, so now I will that thou renew it in the sight of all this people, and assure me that I have done well to promise in thy name.' And the wolf lifted up his paw and placed it in the hand of St. Francis. The wolf lived two years

at Gubbio; he went familiarly from door to door without harming any one, and all the people received him courteously, and fed him with great pleasure, and no dog barked at him as he went about. At last, after two years, he died of old age; and the people of Gubbio felt his loss greatly, for when they saw him going about so tamely amongst them all he reminded them of the virtue and sanctity of St. Francis.

Maxim of the Saint.

'When men recognise and honour God in His creatures they derive no small benefit for their souls.'

Prayer.

We thank Thee, O Lord, for having created all things for our use and benefit. All creatures bear witness constantly to Thy power, Thy wisdom, and Thy goodness; they invite us to join with them in praising, blessing, and thanking Thee. But we, being unfortunately too much attached to the goods and pleasures of this world, are deaf to their voice. We think only of how we can make them minister to our material wants, to the gratification of our passions; oftentimes, alas, we make use of them only to offend Thee, instead of applying them to the noble and sublime end for which they were created. Enlighten our minds, O Lord, purify our hearts, that we may see Thee in all creatures, and thus may know, love, and praise Thee upon earth, until we have the happiness of knowing, loving, and praising Thee for ever in heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

ELEVENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

EXTERIOR POVERTY OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—We read in the holy Gospels that a rich young man once came to our Lord, and said to Him, 'Good Master, what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?' And He said to him, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' The young man answered, 'All these have I kept from my youth; what is yet wanting to me?' Then Jesus added, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' Thus the beauty of poverty was first revealed to the world by the mouth of Incarnate Wisdom; until then it had been considered a misfortune, an evil, the great curse of society. And not only does our Lord praise poverty, but He points it out as the quickest and safest road to heaven; as the means of attaining sanctity and reaching the heights of perfection. And, in order to encourage us in following this counsel, our Divine Master practised it most perfectly, living and dying in such poverty as not to have, as He Himself says, whereon to lay His head. His Apostles and disciples, and many of the primitive Christians, willingly and joyfully followed His example. Christ loved this virtue so much, as to say that without it perfection is impossible: 'Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Not, my brethren, that riches are bad in themselves, or that the possession of them must necessarily lead us to hell. O, no; they, like all other

creatures, are a gift of God, and if well used they will be a means of attaining salvation. Therefore our Lord does not *command* poverty, He counsels it. It is, however, too easy for a man inclined naturally to earthly things to abuse riches, and they become a real source of danger to him, and a cause of perdition. The cares attending the possession of riches, the desire of increasing them, and the constant fear of losing them must engross the mind and prevent it from attending quietly to the things of God, and from seriously meditating upon death or practising good works. This is not all; riches become only too frequently the means of satisfying the passions and the cause of excesses. It is said 'money is everything;' and, unfortunately, it is but too true. O, how many sins would never be committed if men had only the necessaries of life! Therefore St. Bernard says truly, 'Do not attach your heart to those things which, when possessed, cause anxiety; when loved, stain the conscience; and when lost, overwhelm you with affliction.'

Second Point.—This holy Poverty, deprived, as the great poet tells us, of her first Spouse, Jesus Christ, remained for more than a thousand years despised, neglected, and shunned by men. But when God deigned to recall mankind (led astray by the inordinate love of riches and pleasures) to the knowledge and love of Himself and of heavenly things, He provided her with a second spouse, closely resembling the first, namely, Francis of Assisi, who, as soon as he knew her, took her to himself, loved her most ardently, and remained inseparably united to her even until death. Poverty had indeed been practised by many Christians, by solitaries and monks, and, in a certain degree, by *all the saints;* but, until the time of our holy Father,

it had never been professed or practised so rigorously and strictly by any Order, never preached to the world so eloquently, never loved so tenderly, and, therefore, it had never produced such abundant fruit. When he heard those words of the Gospel, 'Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff,' he exclaimed, with indescribable joy, 'Behold what I seek!' At that instant he cast down his staff, threw away his purse, took off his shoes, and, girding himself with a coarse rope, sought only how most perfectly to carry out the apostolic life. St. Bonaventure tells us that from this time to the end of his life he had only a poor habit, girded by a cord. He considered himself truly blessed and highly favoured by Heaven when he had only an old sack, received as an alms, to cover him; a cave in the depths of a wood to shelter him; the earth for his bed; a hard crust for food, and a few drops of water to quench his thirst. The sight of this wondrous model of poverty, the burning words with which he proclaimed everywhere the praises of *this* his lady, incited all hearts to contempt of the world, and extinguished in them the love of riches and earthly things. Many persons, of all ages and conditions, even great and learned men, joyfully turned their backs upon the world, and followed courageously in the steps of the 'poor one of Assisi.' Innumerable virgins, in the flower of youth, abandoned the comforts and delicacies of their homes, and shut themselves up in cloisters, in order to lead a poor and hidden life with Christ. Numbers of faithful souls, of all ranks and both sexes, unable to quit the world, became so enamoured of poverty as to consider their riches as belonging more to the poor than to themselves, and, as

faithful stewards, made use of them only to attain heaven. Thus it was that, through St. Francis, evangelical poverty flourished, producing marvellous fruits of sanctity and perfection.

Third Point.—We have seen, my brethren, the poverty of Francis. He possessed nothing, really nothing. And upon this nothing he founded his Order, giving, as the first precept of his Rule, that the brethren are to have nothing of their own, neither house, nor land, nor anything; and the second, they shall not receive money or rents. He wills that those who desire to enter his Order should execute literally the command of Christ, 'Go sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor.' It is only on this condition that he will acknowledge the Friars Minor as his children, wishing poverty to be the mark of his followers, as charity is the mark of true Christians. But we, who by the mercy of God are of the number of His followers, do we *love* poverty, or are we satisfied with the name only? Let us examine carefully, my brethren, for it is a most important point for those who have made a solemn profession of it. Is the habit we wear poor and simple, or is there any vanity or softness about it? Is our cell humbly furnished as the room of a poor person should be? Is our food spare and frugal, or is it choice and abundant? When necessity or duty obliges us to mix in society, do we behave humbly and respectfully to all, as the poor should do, or are we proud and forward, as if we were persons of rank? If our conscience reproach us, if we cannot answer these interrogations satisfactorily, let us hasten to amend what we find amiss, or else St. Francis will not recognise us as his children. Let us not deceive ourselves by saying *that the times* are changed; that, in the present

state of things, alterations are necessary; that it is not the place of one individual to remedy the evil. No, this is no excuse, because the substance of our Rule has not altered with the times. Whoever is a true Friar Minor must be poor at all times, in every place—poor, not in name only, but in fact; always, however, allowing reasonable modifications, according to the circumstances of time and place, and the constitutions peculiar to each branch of the great seraphic family.

Example.

Poverty was so constantly practised by our saint, that we find it in every circumstance of his life; but I will choose one which seems to me particularly characteristic and beautiful because it happened before his entire consecration to God. Whilst he was busy repairing the church of St. Damian, the priest who had care of this church took compassion on this indefatigable labourer, and prepared for him a good repast when his day's work was done. Francis at first profited gratefully by this kindness; but he soon began to say to himself, 'Wilt thou always find a priest so kindly disposed towards thee? Is this the kind of life thou hast undertaken? No; for the future thou must go as a poor man, begging from door to door, with a dish in thy hand, in which thou shalt not blush to put all that may be given thee. In this manner it becomes thee to live for the love of Him who was born in poverty, lived in poverty, who hung naked on the cross, and who, after death, was buried in another man's sepulchre.' In fact, the next day he took a dish and humbly begged for food from door to door, and then sat down in the street to eat what had been given him. At the first *mouthful* of this disgusting mess he felt such a

nausea that he was on the point of throwing it away; but at that instant he was inflamed with a most ardent love for holy poverty, and, reproaching himself for his weakness, he at once ate the loathsome food with as much avidity as if it were the best meal he had ever tasted. He was so strengthened, both in body and soul, by this repast as to be ever after able to suffer willingly, for the love of God, all that is most bitter and repugnant to nature. Then thanking the Father of the poor for having given such marvellous virtue to this food, he went to the charitable priest, and told him not to take any more trouble to provide for him, adding playfully that he had found an excellent procurator and a skilful cook who knew well now to prepare his meals.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Be very careful not to swerve in the least from the practice of poverty, no matter what counsels or teaching you may hear to the contrary.'

Prayer.

O God, who out of Thy great goodness and mercy didst inspire us to make the vow of poverty (or at least to practise this virtue so dear to our seraphic Father), in order to advance with greater ease and rapidity on our road to heaven, and to imitate more closely Thy Divine Son, grant us the grace to observe it in its utmost perfection. Destroy in us the spirit of self-love and sensuality, which leads us to seek our ease and to desire comforts and delicacies; which makes us unwilling to bear the shame and inconveniences of poverty, and constantly suggests excuses and pretexts for dispensing ourselves from its observance. Do not allow us to be unfaithful to our promises, lest at the

last day we hear, to our confusion, from Thy lips, and those of our seraphic Father, those awful words, 'I know you not.' Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWELFTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ST. FRANCIS WAS POOR IN SPIRIT.

First Point.—Our Divine Redeemer still continues to instruct us, my brethren,—we, who are so happy as to have a place in His school. Let us listen attentively to His words, and, if we wish to please Him, let us endeavour to practise His heavenly teaching. Ascending a mountain one day and sitting down to teach, the first words He uttered were these: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Why does He say blessed are the poor in *spirit?* Because there are, unfortunately, many who are so poor exteriorly as to have neither food nor clothing, but who murmur at their hardships and covet riches. Christ does not call these poor in spirit; He has no blessing for them, and does not promise to such as these the kingdom of heaven. Others have perhaps renounced riches in fact, but still cling to them in affection, so that they do not willingly bear the burden of poverty, they would gladly return to their possessions if they could; these, therefore, are neither poor in spirit nor blessed. St. Basil the Great tells us that those are poor in spirit who, inspired from on high, have will-

ingly become poor for the love of God, not from necessity, but from choice, and who never repent the election they have made. Those also are poor in spirit who, having abundance of temporal goods, are not attached to them, and would willingly relinquish them if the sacrifice would conduce to their salvation. From this we learn that riches are not in themselves bad, though dangerous; that the sacrificing of them for the love of God is a counsel, not a precept; that poverty consists more in the will and the heart than in exterior deprivations. In any case, we must remember that an inordinate attachment to riches or an excessive desire of acquiring them is always forbidden by the law of God, according to that saying of the Holy Ghost: 'Let those who use this world be as though they used it not;' and 'If riches abound set not your heart upon them.'

Second Point.—Francis was truly poor in spirit; his love of poverty was so great that we may say, without fear of contradiction, no saint ever excelled him in this virtue. He loved all virtues; but his love for poverty was inexpressibly tender and ardent: he appeared to be infatuated with it; he would call it by the tenderest names—his lady, his mother, his sister, his beloved spouse. He would weep bitterly when he thought how it was despised and repulsed by men, and was inconsolable because all Christians would not love and embrace this virtue. He praised all virtues, but he could not find terms sufficiently forcible in which to extol his favourite. 'Know, my brethren,' he would say, 'that poverty is the queen of virtues, because she shone resplendently in Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and in His Blessed Mother. Poverty is elevated above all earthly things and tramples them under her feet. This is the hidden treasure of the Gospel, the founda-

tion-stone of our Order, a secure road to heaven, the support of humility, the mother of self-abnegation, the source of obedience, the slayer of self-love; it detaches the heart from vanity and cupidity, and is the root of perfection. This virtue descends from heaven, it enables us to despise all transitory goods, and removes the obstacles which impede the perfect union of the soul with God.' He prayed for all virtues; but the one he most earnestly asked of God, imploring herein the assistance of the saints, was poverty. St. Bonaventure says, 'No one ever desired riches so ardently as Francis longed for poverty.' He wished his religious to practise all virtues, but poverty was the one he most recommended to them, telling them to consider it as their special characteristic, the distinctive mark of the Order, their inheritance, a treasure which had been confided to their care, and which they must guard jealously; he frequently admonished them in these words: 'Let poverty always shine amongst you, principally in your houses; live in them as if they were not your own, but the property of others, and dwell therein as strangers and pilgrims.' If he found anything contrary to poverty in the convents which he visited, he would refuse even to enter them, and oblige his friars to abandon these houses. He was eminent for all virtues, but was quite singular in his practice of poverty; this was the foundation on which he raised that wonderful edifice of sanctity which has excited and will excite the admiration of all ages. 'Francis,' says an illustrious member of our Order, 'was the lover, the spouse, the historian, the philosopher, the theologian, the orator, the poet, the great restorer, and the peaceful king of the poverty of Jesus Christ.'

Third Point.—I take for granted, my brethren,

that, as many of us have renounced the world by our religious profession, we are really so poor as to have nothing superfluous, nothing which in value or appearance would be unbecoming to our state. But St. Jerome says this will not suffice, for philosophers and others have despised and renounced earthly goods as the source of trouble and anxiety. We must also renounce all affection to riches; that is, we must be poor in spirit, as the Apostles and saints have been. This is an especial and most stringent obligation for us, who glory in the title of 'children of the poor one of Assisi;' otherwise we are mere hypocrites, and can never expect to be recognised by him. Are we really detached from the things lent us for our use? Are we willing to give them up at the first intimation of the will of superiors? We are poor, I allow, but are we free from all anxiety on that account? Do we abandon ourselves entirely into the hands of Providence for our food and clothing, living from day to day, like the birds of the air, and like our seraphic Father and his first followers? Are we not, on the contrary, anxious to collect as much as we can, fearing, I might almost say, lest God should leave us in want of the necessaries of life? Do we seek out the poorest and simplest things for our use, or do we always try to get the best and most convenient, and even seek dispensations and privileges? If we are ever in want of necessaries, do we remember the poverty we profess, either as a vow or as a virtue, bearing the deprivation with resignation and even holy joy, or do we complain and murmur? Our holy Father tells us that not to suffer these wants patiently is nothing less than to desire again the fleshpots of Egypt, *i.e.* the things of this world. If, my brethren, we wish to correspond to our vocation, to please God and St.

Francis, we must be poor outwardly and inwardly; let us love all virtues, but let poverty be our special favourite, let us take it for our device and our badge; by this alone shall we be held by others to be, as in reality we shall be, the true children of the great patriarch of the poor.

EXAMPLE.

St. Francis consented once to dine with his great friend Cardinal Ugolino; but before the repast he went out secretly and begged some crusts of bread. When he was seated at table with the Cardinal he produced these crusts, and, dividing them carefully, he presented a piece to each of the guests, and also to the waiters, as though it were some dainty morsel he was offering them. The noble Cardinal was confused and ashamed at this conduct on account of his guests. He dared not reprehend the holy man in public; but after dinner, calling him aside, he said to him, 'Why, O beloved friend, have you done this? You have offered me a great insult, bringing these bits of bread to the feast to which I invited you, and covering me with shame before all.' The blessed Father answered him, 'Nay, rather, my lord, I have done you a great honour, for I did honour to a greater Lord. I must be an example and a model to my brethren, and I know that in the Order there will be many who will be true Friars Minor, both in name and deed, who for the love of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, will perform all I have taught them, humbling themselves before all, and serving their brethren in true subjection and humility. But, on the contrary, there will be others, who on account of human respect, or of their evil passions, will refuse to humble themselves to beg alms, and perform other servile work. Therefore I must

teach all who shall enter the Order, that they may be inexcusable before God and man. When I am invited therefore by you, or by any other great lord, I will never blush to ask alms; on the contrary, I consider the food procured by alms as a great honour and a precious gift, sent me by God, who chose me to become the servant of all, and who, when He possessed all things in endless majesty, for love of us became poor and humble and in want of everything. I desire, therefore, that all my brethren, present and future, should know and understand clearly, that my greatest consolation, both for body and soul, is to be seated at the table of the poor; and I rejoice far more when I see before me the poor food received in alms for the love of God, than when I behold well-laid tables and dainty dishes, of which I eat unwillingly. The bread of alms is holy and blessed bread, sanctified by the praise and love of the Omnipotent. When a brother begs he first says, "Praised be the Lord our God;" and adds, "Give an alms for the love of God." Thus praise sanctifies and love blesses this bread.' The Cardinal upon these words embraced him, weeping, and exclaimed, 'My son, do as you see best; the Lord is with you, and you are with Him.'

Maxim of the Saint.

'I find no pleasure or subject of rejoicing in anything, unless holy poverty is visible therein.'

Prayer.

O God, where can we find better words in which to pray to Thee than those of our seraphic Father? O Lord Jesus, show me, I pray Thee, the ways of Thy beloved Poverty; have pity upon me, for I burn with love of her my Lady, and without her I cannot rest.

O Lord, Thou who didst cause me to be enamoured of her knowest how she is sitting in sadness, rejected by all, she, who is queen of all; Thou camest upon this earth in order to unite Thyself to her, and to produce from her, in her, and by her, perfect children. I beseech Thee, O most poor Jesus, to grant me this privilege; I desire only this treasure, I ask this grace, for myself and my children, that for love of Thee they may have nothing of their own under heaven, that they may use sparingly the things given them by others, and that they may suffer poverty as long as they live in this miserable world. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

ON THE ANGELIC PURITY OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—Chastity (which, taken in its strict sense, means renouncing for ever all carnal pleasures in order to serve God more freely, and to arrive more easily at eternal happiness) is, my brethren, a celestial virtue, brought down to earth by the 'Lily of the valley' and the 'Lamb without spot;' for before His coming men were unable to practise it with the exception of a few amongst the chosen people of God. But from the time of the Incarnation, when its practice was facilitated by grace, and by the example of the Son of God, numbers have embraced it; and many have even suffered death and every kind of torment to preserve this treasure pure and undefiled. It is a virtue most

pleasing to Jesus Christ, who chose a virgin for His precursor, a Virgin for His Mother, a virgin for His foster-father, and who, although He was no accepter of persons, had a predilection for St. John because he was a virgin, and at His death recommended His most holy Mother to him. This is a virtue which the fathers of the Church never weary of extolling: they call it the angelic virtue, because it makes men equal and even superior to the angels; for, as St. Chrysostom well observes, 'they being pure spirits are not subject to the temptations and dangers to which men are exposed.' This virtue restores man to a state of primitive innocence, disposes him for heavenly illuminations, and makes him dear to God and his fellow-men. But, on the other hand, how easily may this virtue be stained or lost! It may be compared to a clear crystal, which a breath will sully; to a lily placed amidst thorns, which, if disturbed even by a gentle breeze, will be torn and injured. How difficult it is to keep it pure and undefiled, when in order to do so we have to struggle with the strongest of all the passions—one which is always ready to assail us in any place, at any time, interiorly and exteriorly, and under the most seductive forms! Therefore St. Augustin, who had learnt by experience, tells us, that of all the combats the Christian has to wage, the one against concupiscence is the hardest and the most difficult, because the fight is daily renewed, and the enemy seldom entirely vanquished. However, by the help of God, who never allows us to be tempted above our strength, the victory will be ours if we sincerely will it.

Second Point.—Our saint was one of those fortunate souls who always preserved their virginity intact, as God revealed to one of his companions. It was in-

deed fitting that *his* body, which was destined to be stamped with the true likeness of Jesus crucified, should be pure and undefiled. But we must not suppose that Francis had no struggles to endure in order to preserve this virtue unstained, or that he was never tempted in this respect; quite the contrary. In his youth, although he was of a buoyant and light-hearted disposition, and mixed with vain and worldly youths, St. Bonaventure tells us that, with the assistance of the grace of God, he was never led astray by carnal pleasures. After his entire conversion to God he watched most carefully over his thoughts; and he never relaxed his vigilance even when he attained to the heights of perfection. He never allowed his eyes to rest upon any object which might wound his heart, he never looked a woman in the face, and did not know any by sight. His maxim was that we ought to be very careful as to how we converse with Christian virgins; and that the best way to preach chastity to them was by the modesty of our eyes. If he felt the slightest temptation, he would at once endeavour to overcome it. Therefore, especially at the beginning of his conversion, he would often throw himself into ice-cold water in order to extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy. Once, like St. Benedict, he rolled himself naked amongst thorns in order to put to flight the tempter, who suggested to him to moderate his fasts and vigils; twice he laid down upon burning coals, when his virtue was assailed by two wicked women. These actions, which should not be imitated except by a special inspiration from God, plainly demonstrate the love Francis had for holy purity.

Third Point.—This virtue, my brethren, is respected and admired even in this effeminate and immoral cen-

tury, and by the most licentious. If any one of us, forgetful of his consecration to God, were so unfortunate as to fall into any disorder, he would be despised by all, shunned and reproached even by those who had tempted him to leave the path of duty. A Catholic priest who jealously guards and maintains this virtue can with full freedom exhort and reprove unhappy sinners; his authority will be respected, his advice followed, and his words will produce salutary effects upon all. Therefore we should be most circumspect in our endeavours vigilantly to preserve this ornament of the priestly character, giving no cause of suspicion to worldlings, who will take scandal if they see us imprudent or free in our manner, especially in conversing with the weaker sex. But we religious should weigh attentively the words of our seraphic Father. 'My brethren,' he says, 'we must carefully avoid familiarity and conversations with women; we should never look them in the face, as by this the weak are cast down and the strong become weak. I am convinced that unless a man's virtue be well tried, it is as difficult for him to hold such conversations without contamination as it would be to walk on burning coals without scorching the soles of his feet. It is very dangerous to expose oneself to any occasion which may reawaken the fire that is almost extinguished, and soil the candour of a chaste soul. Conversing with women is a vain and useless employment, unless it be to hear their confessions, and give them some good advice for the salvation of their soul, or some other good reason; but even then we should send them away soon, and give them only short and dry words. Excepting in these cases, what can a religious have to say to them? A presumptuous security will *cause us to be less* watchful, and if the devil can get

hold of a man even by a single hair he will soon change the hair into a rope.' These are most salutary admonitions, my brethren, worthy of such a father; may they be deeply impressed upon our minds and hearts!

Example.

In order to understand the saint's great purity of heart, and his horror of all suggestions of the impure spirit, let us read attentively the following incident related by St. Bonaventure. As he was one night praying in his cell, at the hermitage of Sartiano, the old enemy called him thrice, saying, 'Francis, Francis, Francis.' And when Francis asked him what he sought he answered deceitfully, 'There is no sinner in the world who, if he be converted, shall not obtain pardon of God. But he who shall destroy himself by excessive penance shall obtain no mercy for all eternity.' The man of God knew by revelation the deceit of the enemy, who thus sought to delude him into tepidity, as was proved by the event. For by the breath of that infernal enemy, which is wont to kindle the fire of concupiscence, he was assailed by a violent temptation. Then this holy lover of chastity, laying aside his habit, began to discipline himself severely with his cord, saying, 'Brother ass, thus dost thou deserve to be treated, thus to be beaten. Thou art unworthy to wear the religious habit, the sign of purity. Go thy way, then, whither thou wilt, for thus shalt thou go.' And then, in marvellous fervour of spirit, he left his cell and went out into the garden, and plunged into a heap of snow which had just then fallen. Having done this he gathered the snow in his hands and made seven heaps, which, setting before him, he thus discoursed with his interior man. 'Behold,' said he, 'this largest heap is

thy wife, these four are thy two sons and thy two daughters, the other two are thy servant and thy handmaid, and for all these thou art bound to provide. Make haste, then, to provide clothing for them, lest they perish with cold. But if the solicitude for so many trouble thee, then be thou solicitous to serve one Lord alone.' Then the tempter, being vanquished, departed, and the holy man returned victorious to his cell; and by the intensity of that external cold to which he had subjected himself the interior fire of temptation was so perfectly extinguished that from that moment he never felt it in the slightest degree.

Maxim of the Saint.

'The bitterest enemy a man has is his own flesh.'

Prayer.

O God, who hast inspired many of us to consecrate our chastity to Thee by a solemn and irrevocable vow, grant that we may ever preserve pure and intact this virtue, so necessary for the due fulfilment of our religious and priestly duties. Strengthen us against all temptations, interior or exterior, which without Thy help would make not merely poor weak reeds like ourselves, but even the strongest columns of the sanctuary, tremble. If, however, it be Thy will that we should be tried as Paul, Francis, and so many other saints have been in order to prove our fidelity and constancy, give us likewise grace to resist, or we shall certainly perish. Hear us, we beseech Thee, through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother, the Queen of Virgins, and of Thy faithful servant St. Francis, who by word and example has recommended this virtue to us. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c., as page 7.

FOURTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—To renounce for the love of God, not only all earthly possessions, but also all the lawful pleasures of life, by the vows of voluntary poverty and perpetual chastity, is certainly a great sacrifice, and one most pleasing to God; but the renouncing of our own will, submitting it entirely to the will of superiors by the vow of obedience, is a much greater, in fact the greatest sacrifice that man can make, and therefore the one most acceptable to God. And how can it be otherwise? Temporal goods are gifts of God, which He can take back at any moment, and which we can scarcely call our own; but free will, which we religious sacrifice to Him by the vow of obedience, is our whole self. Although it is a gift from God it is really ours, because God cannot deprive us of it without at the same time destroying our moral being, the source of merit or demerit. Therefore the saints and spiritual writers agree that the vow of obedience is the most noble and generous act in the power of man, an act which renders him truly master of himself, for at one blow it destroys self-love, the cause of all our spiritual miseries. For this reason the founders of religious Orders have always strongly inculcated the obligation of obedience upon their subjects; being convinced that if they obeyed this all other virtues will follow, this being the foundation and distinctive mark of a true religious. Let us hear the words of our own St. Bonaventure. 'All the perfection of the religious life,' he says, 'consists in

renouncing our own will.' Jesus Christ impressed this truth most forcibly upon His disciples, since He, who is the Lord of all things, the King of heaven and earth, not only obeyed the will of His Father even unto the death of the cross, but also (and this should fill us with admiration and confusion) He was obedient and submissive to two of His own creatures, who, although exalted above all others, were still mere creatures, Mary and Joseph. St. Bernard, after meditating on this, exclaims, 'Learn, O man, to obey; learn, O handful of earth, to be subject; learn, O pinch of dust, to do the will of another.'

Second Point.—St. Francis proposed Christ to himself as his model in all things, and from His example he learned a great love for this virtue. 'Beloved brethren,' he would say to his religious, 'fulfil promptly the command given you; do not wait to have it repeated. Do not imagine there is any impossibility in it, for even if I were to require something above your strength, holy obedience would enable you to accomplish it. Do not consider the rank or the qualities of the person in authority; remember only that he is your superior.' Although, by the command of God and of the Sovereign Pontiff, Francis was the General of the whole Order, still he always preferred obeying to commanding, and he said one day in confidence to his companions, 'One of the graces which I have received from God is this, that if a novice who had been but an hour in religion were appointed my guardian, I would obey him with as much readiness as I would the most ancient and experienced religious.' These sentiments, my brethren, reveal to us how perfect this virtue was in him. And he was not satisfied with *words, but,* according to his wont, he practised what he

taught. Therefore whenever he went on a journey he would chose a companion, to whom he promised obedience as to his guardian, and this promise he faithfully kept. When he resigned the office of Minister-General he asked Brother Elias, his successor, to appoint him a guardian whom he should obey in all things, and Fra Angelo da Rieti was assigned him, to whom he was always perfectly submissive. Nor was this all: the love he had for obedience induced him to reveal the secret favours which God had bestowed upon him, to limit somewhat his charities to the poor, to relax his rigid penances and mortifications, and when dying he clothed himself by obedience in an old tunic. He who was always so kind and loving with his children would severely punish any fault against obedience. We all know how, when one of his religious obstinately refused to obey his guardian, he had him buried up to the neck, and would not release him until he was truly penitent.

Third Point.—No one who watches the course of events can deny that, at the present day, society is completely disorganised; confusion, anarchy, and disorder everywhere prevail; and unless God come to our assistance, a barbarism worse than that of the early ages, because more refined and malignant, seems likely to result. What is the cause of so great an evil? Insubordination and contempt of lawful authority, in a word, disobedience. The cry for years past has been, 'We will not be subject, we will not obey; we are all equal in our nature, let us therefore break the chains that fetter us, let us cast aside the laws that bind us, let us be free.' Woe to us if this cry of the world were to be echoed in our cloisters; the very foundation of religious life would then be shaken, and the convent would be ruined. Let us never forget the advice of the

pious Gerson, that a religious enters the cloister, not to command, but to obey. Let us be persuaded that obedience would remedy many of the evils from which we suffer as religious. Our numbers are greatly diminished, for we are either turned out of our convents or barely tolerated in them; very many of our brethren are at present wandering through the world without a roof to shelter them, the houses of the Order having been confiscated or destroyed. This is a fact, my brethren, which demands our serious consideration. If we wish to do our part towards remedying these evils, if we desire the Order to rise again in beauty and strength, when it shall please God to lay aside the chastising rod, let us endeavour to keep the spirit of obedience alive within us. 'Because,' says that most innocent soul, our Blessed Giles, 'obedience is the road to all good and every virtue; whilst disobedience, on the contrary, is the road to all evil and every vice.'

Example.

Our seraphic Father being one day asked whom he considered really obedient, 'Take,' he replied, 'a dead body and place it where you will: it will not refuse to be moved, it will not complain of its position, it will not ask to be changed. If it is placed on an elevated seat it still looks down, if clothed in purple it becomes paler. This,' he said, 'is like a truly obedient soul, who does not murmur if removed, does not care where he is placed, does not complain if he is changed, who remains humble when raised to dignities, and who despises himself in proportion as he is exalted by others.' 'See,' said our holy Father another time, 'see a poor blind man who has no one to guide him but a dog. He follows this dog and goes where he is led—he does not

ask his guide why he takes him this way or that; if he leads him over rough stones he still follows, if through the streets and squares he still goes with him, if he takes him into a church he prays, if into a house he begs; thus he follows the dog everywhere, and goes nowhere without him. Such is a truly perfectly obedient man. He should obey blindly—he should close his eyes, as it were, before the commands of his superiors, so as not to judge or criticise them, but promptly and humbly to fulfil them; wherever the superior leads by his command, or even by his simple wish, there he should follow; if the road be hard and stony, he should still follow cheerfully through holy obedience. A truly obedient man should not consider the difficulty of the command, but the authority of the one who commands, and the merit of obedience.' How beautiful are these comparisons, my brethren, which by their simplicity remind us of the parables with which our Divine Master taught the crowds in the fields of Palestine, and which vividly paint the feelings of Francis about true obedience.

Maxim of the Saint.

'The subject should not consider the person of his superior, but only God, for whose love he obeys.'

Prayer.

Give us light, O Lord, to understand that religious without obedience are like bodies without souls, like a building without foundation, like a traveller without a guide; in a word, religious in name only. Extinguish in us this accursed self-love, which makes subjection to others appear hard and humiliating to us, which prompts us to seek our own ease, and to avoid

the mortifications springing from the practice of obedience. Grant that we may obey with alacrity and perseverance whatever superior it pleases Thee to give us; considering him not as a man like ourselves, but as Thy representative, as one who holds Thy place upon earth; purify our hearts, that we may not obey through human respect, but solely to please Thee, and to fulfil the promise we made at the foot of Thy altar; in reward for which Thou didst promise us, by the mouth of Thy sacred minister who received our profession, eternal life. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c., as page 7.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

PROFOUND HUMILITY OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—Christian humility may be defined as the true knowledge of oneself, and living according to that knowledge. Faith and reason both concur to show us the necessity of this virtue, which a rapid glance at the nature of our being will tend to confirm. What are we as regards our inferior nature, that is our body? The Holy Ghost tells us, and our own experience proves, that we are only earth and clay, so weak and fragile that a very little would suffice to reduce us to dust. If this clod of earth lives in a palace, clothed in purple, or in a cabin, barely covered with rags, it matters little; the substance is always the same, viz. *dust and ashes.* 'O man,' says the Holy Ghost, 'who

art but dust and ashes, dost thou dare to be proud?' Let us now consider the superior part of our being, our soul. Here we certainly find talents and gifts, either natural or supernatural, some less, some more; these at least belong to us? 'No,' answers St. Paul; 'what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?' And if thou art superior to others in virtue, science, power, or dignity, who has made thee so, if not God? And if thou hast received more than others, thou wilt have to render a stricter account than they. On the other hand, my brethren, how many defects and omissions, how many imperfections and sins, do we not find mixed up with these gifts and graces! These, indeed, are our own; we have either committed them or inherited them from our first parents. God has no share in them. Therefore we find that we have nothing of our own but evil; and shall we glory in that? To do so would be, not merely foolish pride, but diabolical malice. In this way self-knowledge leads to humility, because it teaches us that we are nothing; that without the grace of God we can do no good work, whilst there is no evil of which we are not capable if left to ourselves. These truths are intelligible only to the humble, and to pure and noble souls; the proud and base-minded ridicule this language.

Second Point.—St. Bonaventure says that this beautiful virtue of humility, which is the guardian and ornament of the others, shone resplendently in our saint. In his own estimation he was a grievous sinner, though he was in truth the mirror and the glory of all sanctity. Upon this foundation he studied to build up himself, having laid, as a wise architect, that founda-

tion which he had learned from Christ. He was wont to say that the Son of God had descended from the bosom of His Father to our lowliness, that so, by His example, as well as by His words, He, our Lord and Master, might teach us humility; and therefore, as the true disciple of Christ, he sought to abase himself, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, remembering the words of our Divine Master, 'That which is highly esteemed among men is hateful in the sight of God.' And he had these words continually in his mouth, 'What a man is in the eyes of God, so much he is and no more.' He held it therefore to be a folly to be elated by the favours of the world, and thus he rejoiced in contempt, and was troubled at praise. He loved rather to meet with one who blamed him than with one who praised him, knowing that reproof leads to amendment, while praise excites to sin. And because the people often extolled his sanctity he commanded certain of the brethren that, contrariwise, they should revile him, and address to him words of contempt; and when a brother (though against his will) called him a villain, a hireling, a useless person, with a joyful heart and countenance he made answer, 'May the Lord bless thee, my dearest son, for thou speakest truly, and such words it befits the son of Peter Bernadone to hear.' When he heard himself praised and blessed by many he would say, 'Do not praise one who is not sure of salvation. No man is to be praised whose end is uncertain.' This to those who praised him; and to himself, 'Francis, if God had given to a robber the graces He has given to thee, he would be far more grateful than thou art.' He constantly recommended humility to his brethren, and with a view to preserve them in it he forbade them to seek privileges, or to accept

honours and dignities, and wished them to be called 'Minors,' that is, the last and least of all.

Third Point.—We, my brethren, children and followers of Francis, bear the name of Minors, or least of all; but do we esteem ourselves as such? Pride is a revolting vice in any one, and the proudest person will recoil from it if he see it in another; but in us religious it is a real monster. To shave our heads, dress in a coarse habit, gird ourselves with a rope, and walk barefoot, to profess extreme poverty and great humility as we do, and yet to indulge thoughts of vanity and pride, is a manifest contradiction, a monstrous incongruity, which deserves the contempt and abhorrence of mankind. And not only does it excite the hatred of men, but, what is far worse, it draws down upon us the wrath of God, who has declared that He resists the proud, that He will humble them, and that they shall never enter into His kingdom. How could He indeed admit men tainted with pride into His glory when it was this vice which excluded the rebel angels from heaven, and drove our first parents from the terrestrial paradise? Woe to the proud man; he will suffer great evils even in this life, and far greater for all eternity. Supposing, my brethren, that we are in some way better than others, let us always remember that this good quality, whatever it may be, is a gift from God, which He wishes us to use for His glory and the good of our neighbour; instead of taking pride in it, it should fill us with deep humility and fear, remembering the rigorous account we shall have to render to God for the same. We should refer all praise and honour which we receive to God, saying with the Royal Prophet, 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory.' Ignoble souls and weak minds foster pride,

whilst humility engenders greatness and generosity. As Father Faber profoundly remarks: 'To humble itself is the genius of the creature and the highest exercise of his reason.' Pride is generally punished, even in this world, by a fall, the shame and disgrace of which bears proportion to its previous exaltation. Let us remember what St. Augustin tells us on this point. 'If you ask,' says he, 'what is the first step in the religious life, and in following Christ, I answer, humility; if you ask what is the second, I answer, humility; if you ask me the third, I say again, humility.'

Example.

St. Bonaventure tells us that Francis, in order to make himself contemptible to all, was not ashamed, when preaching, to manifest his defects before all the people. To choose one instance amongst many. He was once so weakened by a tertian fever as to be unable to stand. The Bishop of Assisi, a most charitable prelate, who loved the saint dearly, had him brought to his own house, where he used every endeavour to restore him to health. But no sooner had he recovered his bodily strength than, filled with self-contempt, he determined to take shame to his body. 'It is not fitting,' he said, 'that the people should account me a mortified man, while I secretly indulge my body.' He rose, therefore, being inflamed with the spirit of holy humility; and having called together the people into the market-place of Assisi, together with many friars whom he brought with him, he entered into the cathedral, and having placed a cord round his neck, he commanded the vicar of the convent to drag him, half naked, to a stone on which condemned malefactors were wont to be placed; and mounting upon this stone,

although he was suffering from ague and excessive weakness, and the weather was intensely cold, he preached with great force and energy to the people there assembled, affirming that he in no wise deserved to be honoured by them as a spiritual man, but rather to be despised by all, as one carnal and gluttonous. All the assembly marvelled greatly at so strange a spectacle, and, well knowing his austerity, they were pierced with compunction, and exclaimed that such humility was rather to be admired than within the reach of imitation. And although, indeed, such an act may rather be called a miracle than an example, nevertheless it was a true lesson of perfect humility, by which every one who would follow Christ is taught to despise the testimony of the world's transitory praise, and to repress the pride of vain boasting, and confute the falsehood of dissimulation.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Let us never forget, my brethren, that we have nothing of our own excepting vices and sins.'

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said, 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart'—we who belong to Thy school wish to learn humility from Thee. Make us understand, we beseech Thee, that we are nothing, that what little we possess comes from Thee, and that Thou wilt require a strict account of it from us; that of ourselves, without Thy grace, we are incapable of any good action, even of a good thought; that we are full of sins and imperfections, capable of committing the most heinous crimes. If we thus obtain a true knowledge of ourselves, we shall never dare to rebel

against Thee by pride, or to exalt ourselves above others. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, Glorias, &c., as page 7.

SIXTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as p. 1.

MEDITATION.

AUSTERE PENANCE OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—A thing most worthy of remark in the sacred Scripture is this, that all the great men who were raised up by God, either to reclaim His people when they had strayed from the path of truth and justice, or to perform great things for His glory, began their mission by preaching penance. For instance: 'If the wicked do penance for all his sins,' saith the Lord by the mouth of Ezechiel, 'and keep all My commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die.' 'Be converted to Me with all your heart,' He says again through His Prophet Joel, 'in fasting, in weeping, and in mourning.' 'Do penance,' cries the Baptist in the desert, 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 'Repent ye therefore and be converted,' says the Apostle Peter to the deicide Jews, 'that your sins may be blotted out.' And Jesus Christ Himself says, in still more terrible words, 'Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish.' Therefore, my brethren, penance, which the world rejects as useless, which it refuses even to hear mentioned, must needs be very necessary for salvation, since it has been inculcated so frequently, and those who refuse to practise it are

threatened with such terrible punishment. There are, as you well know, only two ways to heaven—innocence and penance. If we have lost the first (and which of us dare affirm that he has not?), the second alone remains open to us. This is a hard saying, and it fills us with fear; but it is true, and cannot be denied. The Apostle St. Paul gives us the reason, saying, 'As you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification.' All the saints, with Christ Himself at their head (who, being innocence and holiness itself, wished to instruct us), walked in the path of penance; and if we wish to be admitted where they now are, we must follow in their footsteps. I do not deny that this language is very different from that of the world or of our self-love; but we must hearken to the voice of Christ and the saints, which leads to salvation, and not follow those false maxims which tend to perdition.

Second Point.—It cannot surely be necessary for us to prove that Francis practised penance. His whole life was one of rigorous austerity. But in order to form a more correct idea of it, we will mention here what St. Bonaventure tells us of him. He took barely enough food and rest to sustain life, saying it was hard to satisfy the necessities of the body without yielding to the allurements of the senses. When he was well he scarcely ever ate cooked food, or, if he did so, would cover it with ashes or pour water over it, so as to render it insipid and disgusting. Wine is not even mentioned, for he never drank enough water to quench his burning thirst. He observed six Lents, besides the one of the Universal Church, so that we may say he fasted continually. His bed was the bare ground, on which he

would rest when very much fatigued; but he generally slept sitting, leaning his head against a tree or a stone. His dress was a single tunic of rough texture, inside as well as out; and when asked how this light and worn-out habit could protect him from the piercing cold, he replied, 'If we were inflamed interiorly with a true desire for our heavenly country, we should easily bear exterior cold.' He went always barefoot, summer or winter, through stones and mud; all his long and arduous journeys were performed on foot. This was his usual manner of life; but who can tell all the privations, hardships, disciplines, and penances with which he subdued his body, which he called his greatest enemy? We know that in death he asked pardon for the ill-treatment he had given it, and we must remember that he was always weak and delicate. 'Ah,' said Brother Giles, his companion, 'one thing only was wanting to Francis—strength of body. If his health had been as robust as mine, no one could have imitated him in bodily penances.'

Third Point.—Let us now, my brethren, draw a comparison between ourselves and Francis. This consideration must always be beneficial to us, as we are his children and devout clients. Can we compare our spiritual life to his? No, certainly. He was most innocent; for although he would accuse himself of grievous sins, and weep bitterly over them, yet, according to the opinion of a pious writer, what he bewailed as crimes we should perhaps consider as meritorious actions. His soul was besides adorned with all virtues, and he was beloved by God and man. We, on the contrary, can lay no claims to innocence; we have many times grievously offended God. We are devoid of virtue, cold and negligent in God's service: can we deny it? Having

thus compared our life with that of our holy founder, and found it so different, let us now compare our penance with his. His, we know, was most austere and rigorous. What is ours? Do we practise any? We certainly cannot assert with truth that we lead a penitential mortified life. Francis, although he was innocent and most virtuous, did severe penance, and we, who are sinful and devoid of virtue, fly from it. Can we hope to arrive where he is by a path diametrically opposed to the one he trod? We allow that extraordinary penances, such as those he performed, are not necessary for salvation; but to refuse to hear of mortification, to be unwilling to bear patiently those trials which God sends us, to complain of the poverty and restraints belonging to our state, this is surely inexcusable. If no one can be saved without penance, as Christ Himself has said, least of all can we, who profess to practise it most strictly, hope to reach heaven without it. Jesus Christ suffered frightful torments, and even death itself, to appease the justice of God, irritated by our sins; and shall we refuse to undergo anything for the sins we ourselves commit, and yet expect to reign with Him in glory? No, indeed; for St. Paul tells us, that if we suffer with Him we may be also glorified with Him, otherwise we cannot attain to this glory. Courage, then, my brethren; let each one of us embrace a life of penance and mortification proportioned to our strength, reflecting with the same Apostle, 'that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.' Let us reflect, with St. Bernard and the pious Gerson, that if we tremble at these words of our Redeemer, 'Do penance,' we shall find those others, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,'

far more terrible; and if we refuse to hearken to the former we shall infallibly hear the latter.

Example.

As though the severe macerations which Francis inflicted on his body were insufficient, the devils came many times, as St. Bonaventure tells us, to ill-treat him. In order to learn more fully his feelings on the subject of penance, we will relate one of these visitations: One evening, wearied with a journey, Francis retired, as was his wont, into a small deserted church in order to pass the night in prayer, for he had learnt by experience that the consolations of the Holy Spirit are more freely enjoyed in solitary places far from the noise and distraction of the world. Here a number of demons attacked him, as they had of old St. Anthony Abbot, threatening to kill him, and endeavouring to disturb him in his prayer; but the more vehemently he was assailed by his enemies, the more fervently and earnestly he had recourse to God, saying, 'Protect me under the shadow of Thy wings from the face of the wicked who afflict me.' And then to the demons, 'Do your worst, malignant and lying spirits; you can do nothing but what you are permitted by God; and I am ready to suffer with all joy whatsoever His divine goodness has decreed for me.' The devils, enraged at his constancy, attacked him with still greater fury; they fell upon him on all sides, and, throwing him upon the ground, dragged him some distance, beating him outrageously. He, in the midst of these sufferings, exclaimed, 'I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the favours Thou hast granted me, and for the great mercy which Thou showest me at present, in deigning *to punish* me for my sins in this world, that Thou

mayest pardon me in the next, which is a sure sign of Thy love towards me. My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready to suffer even more, if it be Thy will.' He related this himself next day to his companions when they found him exhausted and bruised from the combat.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Blessed are they who die in the practice of penance, for they shall be admitted into the kingdom of heaven.'

Prayer.

We acknowledge, O God, that we are sinners, and have often grievously offended Thy infinite justice; we know that unless the sinner do penance for his sin he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; we know that, as followers of that great penitent Francis, we are bound to imitate him; we know, likewise, that it is our duty to preach penance to others, more by our example than by words. All this we know, and yet, weighed down by our inordinate self-love, we do not know how to make up our minds to embrace a life of penance. Rouse us from our lethargy, O Lord, by the fear of eternal punishment; draw us by the attraction of Thy celestial joys, strengthen us by the help of Thy powerful grace, that we may bring forth worthy fruits of penance. Thus may we hope to obtain the forgiveness of our sins and the eternal recompense promised to true penitents. Amen.

Paters, Aves, Glorias.

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

RIGOROUS MORTIFICATION OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—Mortification, which consists in resisting our passions whenever they excite us to evil, is the inseparable companion of penance, and equally necessary; penance punishes the sin committed, mortification prevents its commission. Mortification is even more necessary for us, and renders us more secure than penance: more necessary, because penance, strictly speaking, is indispensable only to the sinner, whilst all are in need of mortification; more secure, because external penance may exist without internal mortification, in which case it is hypocrisy or vain-glory; but mortification holds all passions in subjection. In order clearly to understand its necessity let us consider original sin and its effects, without which our present life would be an obscure and incomprehensible mystery. Before Adam sinned perfect harmony existed between man's will and his reason, his mind and body, so that he had no difficulty in ruling over them. But no sooner had he rebelled against God than his passions revolted against him, and pride, hatred, envy, love, fear, and concupiscence strove to gain the mastery over him, and to force him to the commission of acts which, though his reason had been obscured by his fall, he knew to be sinful. As time advanced the world added its allurements, and the devil was constantly fanning the flame by inciting the passions. In this our present miserable state we are obliged to fight continually with our inclinations, which, if followed, will infallibly lead

us to hell. Therefore the holy man Job says, 'The life of man is a warfare upon earth;' and St. Paul exclaims, writing to the Romans, 'I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind;' and Christ tells us, 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.' Mortification is the powerful weapon with which to combat these our spiritual enemies, and if we once let it fall from our hands our defeat is inevitable.

Second Point.—Although Francis in his youth had never given the rein to his passions, and at the time of his conversion had dealt so severely with them that they were almost annihilated, still he was always on the watch to check every natural impulse. St. Bonaventure tells us that even when he seemed to have attained the very height of perfection he would seek fresh ways of mortifying himself, as though he were only just beginning his conversion. He had made a compact with his senses (which he kept faithfully until death) always to contradict them, even in their least desires. Feeling one day a longing for well-seasoned and nourishing food to repair his strength, which was sensibly diminished, he took from the dung-heap the half-putrid carcass of a fowl, and, holding it to his nose, exclaimed with bitter irony, 'Here, glutton, is the fowl thou desirest; taste it and eat thy fill of it.' If, on arriving at a convent, he inadvertently showed a preference for a particular cell, he would reproach himself for having done so, and go to another wholly unfit for his use. We have already mentioned how, if he felt the slightest temptation against chastity, he would throw himself into ice-cold water, declaring that the spiritual man would far rather suffer the most severe bodily cold than the least spark of concupiscence.

Once, when the devils were ill-treating him, he made the sign of the cross, and said courageously, 'I tell you, on the part of Almighty God, that you may exercise against me all the power which Jesus Christ gives you, and may abuse my body as you choose: I am ready to suffer. This body is a heavy burden to me, it is the greatest enemy I have, a most perverse and rebellious creature: therefore you may punish it as it deserves.' In order to guard the senses, he recommended his religious to fly idleness, saying, 'I would have my brethren to labour and strive, lest they give place by idleness to unlawful thoughts or idle words.'

Third Point.—We shall not be surprised, my brethren, at finding such great and rigorous mortification in Francis when we consider that our passions never cease to assail us, and that at any moment they may rise up and overcome us; they spare neither age nor sex nor rank, nor even the most eminent sanctity, many having been seen to fall who were thought quite secure. If our passions once obtain the mastery it is most difficult to restrain them afterwards; for as a great writer says, the passions first demand, then they exact, and at last they constrain us to yield to them. Seeing, then, that not only Francis, but all the saints, who were certainly more enlightened than we are, found it necessary to exert all their energy to keep them in check, we must also be persuaded that, if we wish to conquer our passions as they did, we must act, at least in some degree, as they have done. If we freely indulge our taste in food or drink we must expect to feel the rebellion of our senses. If we allow our eyes —fitly called the doors of our heart—to rest upon dangerous objects, if we listen to unbecoming conversations, or read bad books, our imagination will be fed

with profane images, and the purity of our heart will be sullied. If in all things we seek that which is agreeable to our fallen nature and attracts our senses, can we be surprised if self, our greatest enemy, betray us into sin? It would be a miracle if it were otherwise, and we cannot expect that God will work one for us; nay more, in consequence of our presumption, He may withdraw His grace from us, and then we shall certainly fall. We must mortify our passions or we shall be defeated. If we wish to be victorious we must practise self-denial, not for a day, or a month, or a year, but our whole lives; 'always bearing about in our body,' as St. Paul tells us, 'the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.'

EXAMPLE.

The following is an admirable proof of the mortification of our saint: One day, towards the end of his life, being at our Lady of Angels, he desired to converse with Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, his eldest born in Christ, who was in a neighbouring wood, engaged in heavenly contemplation, as was his wont. St. Francis proceeded thither, and called him three times with these loving words, 'Brother Bernard, come and speak to this poor blind man.' Brother Bernard, however, being absorbed in God, returned no answer. St. Francis went away troubled and afflicted, wondering how it was that Brother Bernard had not come to him when he called. With this thought on his mind, when he had walked a little way, he told his companion to wait for him, and, retiring to a solitary spot, he fell on his knees, and prayed God to reveal to him why Brother Bernard had not answered his call. As he prayed a voice came from heaven, which said, 'O short-sighted

man, why art thou troubled? Does it seem meet to thee to leave the Creator for the creature? Know that when thou didst call Brother Bernard he was conversing with Me, and I retained him not merely for his consolation, but also to teach thee that spiritual persons are not always their own masters, nor in a state to obey another; there are many things in them which should not be condemned, because they cannot be judged by ordinary rules.' St. Francis, having received this answer from God, called his companion, and went back in haste to seek Brother Bernard. Having found him, he cast himself at his feet, asking pardon, with the most profound humility, for the unkind thought he had had against him; and, stretching himself upon the ground, he said, 'I command thee by holy obedience to trample me underfoot three times, and to set one foot upon my mouth.' Brother Bernard besought him with tears not to lay such a command upon him, but as he dared not disobey so holy a master, he at length tremblingly fulfilled his wish. How severely the saints judge themselves, since they punish a slight imperfection with such rigorous penance!

Maxim of the Saint.

'The Spirit of God inspires a man to mortify, despise, and annihilate his flesh by abjection and opprobrium.'

Prayer.

How often, O Lord, have we fallen into grievous sin, or at least exposed ourselves to imminent danger of it, because we had not courage to mortify our rebellious passions! We profess to follow Thee, poor and crucified; but we have not yet learnt to deny ourselves, *or to bear* patiently the trials and sufferings Thou

sendest for our good. We have chosen the great penitent Francis for our master and model, but we are very far indeed from imitating his penance or mortification. Give us, O Lord, light and grace to see and understand, now at least, that without mortification we can never attain virtue and sanctity, or hope to enter heaven. Give us strength and courage to break with the world, and to subdue the flesh, which is our greatest enemy, to keep all our passions under restraint, especially the one which predominates in us, that so we may obtain the crown of glory which Thou hast promised to those who fight valiantly in this life. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

SINGULAR PRUDENCE OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—How beautiful are all virtues, whether theological or moral! We know not which to prefer, for each has a grace and beauty of its own. They render a man dear to God and to his fellow-men, and even those who have not the courage to practise them secretly admire them. They are the steps by which the soul ascends to heaven, whilst at the same time they are the measure of the glory which awaits her. But they will not be such if unaccompanied by the virtue of prudence, which will adapt them to the circumstances of time and place, guide them securely through every danger, moderate them—for they would

cease to be virtues if there were excess—enlighten us that we may not be dazzled by appearances, confounding them with vices; in a word, make them true solid virtues. Though a man were to possess all other virtues, if prudence be wanting to him he is like a vessel laden with precious merchandise without a pilot, which will certainly strike upon a rock or become the prey of the treacherous waves. This cardinal virtue is defined by Aristotle as a habit of mind by which a man directs his actions by the light of reason. St. Thomas speaks of it as a virtue which assists and coöperates with all the others. St. Augustin says it teaches us what to do and what to avoid. St. Bernard goes farther still, and asserts that without prudence virtues become vices. When we see a virtuous man acting imprudently, we feel a repugnance to have anything to do with him; his virtues lose their charm and have no attraction. Prudence, then, is very necessary; but it must not be that of the world or of the flesh, but that which comes from God, which is indispensable to those who by their office or dignity are called upon to guide and direct others in the way of perfection.

Second Point.—St. Francis, who was the founder and superior of so great an Order, or rather of three Orders, who occupied so important a place in the Church, and who was a model of all virtues, possessed also the virtue of prudence in an eminent degree. Austere as he was to himself, he was kind and indulgent to others. When the famous 'Chapter of Mats' was held near Assisi, he found that many of his religious practised extraordinary penances, by which they injured their health, rendered themselves useless, and even shortened their lives. The holy Father forbade these macerations, and *commanded* them to bring him all the instruments of

penance, which he piled up in a great heap and burnt. He was most abstemious in his food; but when out of his convent he would eat whatever was placed before him, and he desired his friars to do the same, so as not to appear singular or to attract the esteem of men. When charity demanded it he did not hesitate to eat with those religious who were inclined to excessive abstinence, and would tell them that if they denied their body its necessary nourishment it would be unable to bear the yoke of penance or to coöperate with the soul in spiritual exercises, and might reasonably complain. We have already mentioned the poverty of his dress and his aversion for delicacies or superfluities; still he allows his religious to wear shoes if necessary, and expressly commands the superiors to provide their subjects with proper clothing, according to the season and to the climate of the place in which they dwell. He was always opposed to titles of honour, to dignities, or privileges, and to everything that might excite pride or vanity; yet he gave to each one the marks of respect due to his rank, dignity, or merit. He would never publicly correct those religious who were priests, but always admonished them of their faults in private. He had the greatest reverence for old age, and was gentle, affable, and cheerful with all. He certainly had the greatest horror of sin or even of the smallest imperfection, and would often weep over sinners in secret; but he knew how to bear with them and even excuse them at times, in order to avoid greater evils, and would never treat them with over-severity, as others, zealous but less prudent, suggested. 'My brethren,' he says, writing to the provincials, 'be prudent in your commands, compassionate towards sinners, willing to forgive. If you wish your subjects to follow

your advice and fulfil your orders, join example to your words.' In this way our saint, by his great prudence, made himself all to all, and won the love of all.

Third Point.—Happy shall we be, my brethren, if, like our seraphic Father, we are guided by prudence in all things! Had this been the case hitherto we should have advanced more rapidly in perfection, and our labours for our neighbour and for those under our charge would have been more beneficial. What immense good a confessor may do in the tribunal of penance if he is prudent and discreet in the direction of consciences, and knows how to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy, and to discern the peculiar circumstances of each case! What may not a preacher effect if he prudently adapts himself to the time, the place, and the persons with whom he has to deal! But, alas, too often does one act of imprudence destroy the work of years, and render the great labours of others fruitless. Prudence is specially needed by those who are in any way placed over others; without it they cannot fulfil their duties, but will be the occasion of scandals and disorders. Therefore Aristotle, although a pagan, truly remarks that whilst other virtues seem to belong equally to superiors and inferiors, prudence is more requisite to the former. But, my brethren, we must be careful not to allow it to degenerate into human respect or mere worldly wisdom, for this would be a greater evil than imprudence, and the cause of many sins in ourselves and others.

Example.

In what a high degree our holy patriarch possessed this beautiful virtue may be gathered from the description he gives of the qualities which should be conspicu-

ous in the minister-general. He says, 'My children, the head of this Order ought to be of a grave demeanour, of great discretion, of good fame, devoid of all particular affections, lest, loving some, he scandalise the others; a man of prayer, who will so order his time as to devote some hours to his own soul and others to his flock. After his prayer he must apply himself to business. He should not be a respecter of persons, but treat the simple and ignorant with as much love as the wise and learned. Let him kindly console the afflicted, for he is the last resource of those who are in trouble; for if the weak do not obtain proper remedies from him they may fall into despair. If he find any stubborn and insolent, let him humble himself to soften them, and relax a little of his authority to gain souls to Christ. Let him have compassion on those who abandon the Order, as on sheep that have gone astray; let him never refuse to show them mercy, considering how strong the temptation must be which can lead souls to such a step, and that if God were to permit him to be so tempted he might fall into a still lower abyss. It belongs especially to him to discover the secrets of consciences, and to draw the truth from hidden sources. Let him not listen to great talkers; let him be on his guard against those who are constantly finding fault, and not readily give credence to their tales. Let him never believe an accusation until he has obtained clear proofs by diligent examination. Let him beware lest the desire of being maintained in his dignity induce him to relax or infringe the rules of strict justice and equity; let him regulate his conduct in such a manner that none perish through his severity, yet taking care that no foolish weakness and desire to please make him over *indulgent* and lax in promoting discipline, by

which means tepidity would be introduced. Let him be feared by all, and yet loved by those who fear him.' From all this we may see what a knowledge St. Francis had of the human heart, and how much he loved prudence, which alone can regulate and govern it.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Prudence, my brethren, is the guide of all the other virtues—not human prudence, but that taught us by Christ.'

Prayer.

Enlighten our minds, O God, with Thy heavenly wisdom, that holy prudence may ever guide our words and actions, especially those which concern the promotion of Thy glory, our own salvation, and the good of our neighbour. Give us that prudence which Thou dost teach us in Thy Gospel, saying, 'Be ye wise as serpents.' Preserve us from precipitation in our judgments, temerity in our actions, inconstancy in our good resolutions, and negligence in making use of the necessary means and cautions to be observed in the fulfilment of the duties of our station; and grant that we may never become so engrossed by earthly cares as to forget the eternal and celestial happiness for which we have been created, and which we hope to obtain through Thy goodness. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

NINETEENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ADMIRABLE SIMPLICITY OF ST. FRANCIS.

First Point.—Our Divine Master, whilst inculcating prudence, teaches us also simplicity, saying, 'Be ye wise as serpents and simple as doves.' By this He means to show us that there must be no malice or duplicity in our prudence. Worldlings deride the simplicity of the just man, as St. Gregory tells us; but this does not surprise us, for their wisdom is worldly and carnal, and St. Paul says, 'The sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God: for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand.' We must, however, remember that simplicity, when it is a virtue, has many degrees. A weak-minded, illiterate, over-credulous person may be called simple; but this simplicity, although not sinful, because caused by involuntary ignorance, is certainly not a virtue. An inaptitude for learning high and sublime things, when joined to rectitude and candour, is also called simplicity; and this is a real virtue. St. Felix Capuchin possessed this simplicity, and still more Brother Juniper, of whom our holy Father said he wished he had a forest of such Junipers. But there is another simplicity which bespeaks a man victorious over self, the world, and the passions; possessing a profound knowledge of divine and human things, secure in the consciousness of the integrity of his motives, despising and abhorring all dissimulation, even the slightest artfulness or cunning, and in speaking and acting so straightforwardly and ingenuously as to gain all hearts. In this sense men of

profound learning and great intellect are often childlike in their simplicity, as may be seen in their works, witness King David, St. Paul, St. Bernard, St. Philip Neri, and St. Francis of Assisi.

Second Point.—All must agree that St. Francis was simple in the most obvious sense of the word; this simplicity appears in his letters, his Rule, his canticles, his dress, his method of life, and, in fact, in all his words and actions. Now we assert that he was simple in the most sublime sense. Some may be surprised at this, as he is considered by many as having had more piety than intellect, more fervour than genius. Nevertheless it is so. His conduct on some occasions would, humanly speaking, be considered that of a simpleton or fool; but he was guided by the inspiration of God, who tells us by the mouth of St. Paul 'that the wisdom of this world is foolishness before Him.'

Many other things he did which may be called simple if you will, but it was a sublime simplicity even humanly speaking. For instance, to quote one of the best authors of his life, renouncing all things more perfectly and generously than the heathen philosophers, whose disinterestedness was so much admired; undertaking, poor as he was, to restore three churches, a work which would have caused a rich man to hesitate; conceiving the plan of an Order destined to become the most numerous in the Church, obtaining its approbation from the Sovereign Pontiff by means of a simple parable; carrying out his design with a promptness and success which has excited universal admiration for six centuries and a half. Again, the eloquence which could persuade numbers of the rich and worldly to abandon wealth, pleasures, and honours to embrace the poverty, *humiliation*, and penance of the cross; the influence

which he exercised over all, both poor and rich, ignorant and learned, the lowly and the great ones of the earth; the knowledge he had of the Holy Scripture, which he might have known by heart, so appropriately could he always apply it; the courage which induced him to cross the sea, to pass through an army of infidels, and fearlessly to preach the law of Christ to a Mahometan prince, convincing him of the truth of the Christian religion, and obliging him at least to respect it; the labours and fatigues which he underwent for the reformation of morals, for the reëstablishment of peace; in fine, the renovation of the face of the earth, which he effected by the most simple means,—all this demonstrates undeniably that, besides the special assistance of grace, which was abundantly bestowed upon him, he possessed great strength of character, and was by his very nature fitted for noble and heroic deeds. If, as St. Chrysostom says, the perfection of philosophy consists in being simple and prudent, Francis, who possessed these two qualities in so eminent a degree, deserves the name of a great philosopher, and has been considered such by many remarkable men, judging solely from the benefits which he conferred on mankind.

Third Point.—We cannot deny that this virtue of simplicity is a very difficult one to practise, because, to attain the simplicity of Brother Juniper, we must be disposed thereto by nature, whilst that of Francis is so sublime that we can scarcely hope to imitate it. But as Jesus Christ wills us to practise this virtue, and as He never requires anything from us which we cannot perform with the help of His grace, we must endeavour to imitate these two models as well as we can. *Let us,* above all, my brethren, be simple in our

faith, submitting our minds and hearts with docility to the teachings and decisions of the Church, without seeking artificial excuses for our want of faith, as so many do at the present day, and without wishing to search curiously into the divine mysteries, whereby so many unhappily suffer shipwreck of their faith. Let us be simple in our piety and methods of devotion, uniting ourselves to the divine will; going straight to God by the road marked out for us by the holy Gospel, the masters of the spiritual life, and our own good brethren. Let us not be obstinate in following our own lights, by an indiscreet devotion, or affecting singularity, for this would only serve to foster pride. Let us be simple with our brethren and all with whom we have to deal, acting sincerely and openly, without suspicion or dissimulation, because God hates the double-minded, that is, those who have one thing on the tongue and another in their heart; who in everything make use of artifice and deceit: these are hated and shunned even in human society. On the other hand, if we would gain the hearts of all, secure their confidence, and induce them to follow the advice we give for the good of their souls, we must be frank and candid in our dealings with them. Let us, my brethren, so act as to be able to say with the Apostle, 'For our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conversed in this world.'

EXAMPLE.

The following incident proves at once the truthfulness, prudence, and simplicity of St. Francis: It happened that whilst he was staying at the monastery of *Monte* Casale, three notorious robbers, who committed

much evil in the neighbourhood, came to the guardian to beg for food. He, however, reproved them harshly, saying: 'Cruel robbers and murderers, not satisfied with depriving others of the fruit of their labours, you have come here to devour that which is given in charity to the servants of God—you are not worthy that the earth should sustain you, who respect neither man, nor God your Creator; go about your business, and do not come here again.' Much annoyed with these words, the robbers went away in anger. Shortly after St. Francis arrived at the convent with his sack full of bread and a little vessel of wine, which he had received in alms, and the guardian related to him how he had sent away the robbers. St. Francis reproved him sharply, saying that he had behaved most cruelly, for sinners are brought back to God more readily by kindness than by harsh rebukes. 'Wherefore,' said he, 'our Master Jesus Christ, whose word we have promised to observe, says that the whole need not a physician, but the sick; and that He came not to call the just, but sinners, to repentance; and for this reason He often sat down to meat with them. As, then, thou hast acted against charity, and against the Gospel of Christ, I command thee, in the name of holy obedience, to take with thee this sack of bread and vessel of wine and go after the robbers, over the hills and across the valleys, till thou meet with them; when thou hast found them, give them from me this bread and wine. Then, kneeling down before them, thou shalt confess thy fault, and beg them, in my name, not to do any more evil, but to fear God, and never again offend Him. Tell them that if they will consent to this I promise to provide for all their wants, and to give *them daily both meat* and drink. And when thou hast

fulfilled this command thou shalt humbly return to me.' Whilst the guardian went on this errand, Francis began to pray fervently, asking God to touch the hearts of the robbers and bring them to repentance. The obedient guardian, having found out their retreat, presented to them the bread and wine, and said and did all that St. Francis had commanded; and it pleased God that as they ate the bread of charity which the saint had sent them they began seriously to reflect upon their evil doings, and upon the piety and generosity of those holy religious, and, being moved to compunction, they resolved to go immediately to Francis, in order to learn from him what they should do to save their souls and make amends for the sins they had committed. St. Francis comforted them with much kindness and charity, giving them many proofs of the mercy of God, and promising them to ask the Lord to have pity on them. At a later period he received them into the Order, where they led very holy lives.

Maxim of the Saint.

'True simplicity confounds all the wisdom of the world and the flesh.'

Prayer.

We know, O God, that Thou seest the depths of our hearts, that Thou art a just and impartial Judge; and that, although we may succeed in deceiving our fellow-men, we can never hide anything from Thy omniscience. We know also, according to the words of our seraphic Father, that what we are in Thy sight, that we are, and no more. Penetrate our hearts with an intimate sense of Thy divine presence; fill our minds with a holy fear of Thy judgments, that we may walk before *Thee in* simplicity and sincerity, which will make us

dear to Thee and to men; let it suffice for us to be wise in Thy sight, though we should be reputed as fools in the eyes of the world. Never permit us, O Lord, to be degraded by the vice of hypocrisy, nor suffer the smallest duplicity in our hearts, but preserve them undefiled, that so they may be pleasing to Thee. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTIETH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE GREAT LOVE ST. FRANCIS HAD FOR PRAYER.

First Point.—Being composed of two distinct parts, body and soul, we have two distinct lives, one animal, the other spiritual. Each stands daily in need of sustenance in order to preserve health and strength; and if this be denied or given sparingly, death or extreme weakness will ensue. Bread is the food of the body, prayer the nourishment of the soul. When, as often happens unfortunately, we are wholly engrossed in temporal things and in the care of our body, we do not perceive that our soul is perishing through neglect. There are three truths of faith which should be strongly impressed upon our minds: first, that we are unable of ourselves to do good or avoid evil; second, that the grace of God is necessary for us in order to attain eternal life; and third, that grace must be obtained by prayer. These three are like the links of a chain uniting *us to* God; if one be wanting, our union with

Him is broken. St. Augustin expresses this admirably, when he lays down this incontestable principle, that no one can be saved unless God call him, no one can coöperate with the call without the divine assistance, and this is only accorded to him who asks for it by prayer. That assiduous, fervent, and daily prayer is as necessary as divine grace is indisputable. Therefore he who prays will be saved, and without prayer there is no salvation. Our Divine Master, in almost every page of the Gospel, teaches us by word and example to pray, and even gives us an express command to do so. In order that we may have no doubt of the efficacy of our prayer, He assures us many times that we shall be heard. 'Ask,' He says, 'and you shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; whatsoever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.' The holy Fathers never weary of inculcating in the strongest terms the necessity and efficacy of prayer. St. Augustin calls it the key of heaven, by which those treasures of grace are opened to us which we every moment require. St. Chrysostom compares it to a sharp-edged weapon, well calculated to slay the enemies which intercept our progress on the road to heaven; he also describes it as the fountain and source of all the graces which God has in store for us if we petition for them. For this reason the saints made it the principal occupation of their lives. Can we do otherwise?

Second Point.—From the first moment that Francis gave himself entirely to God he recognised the necessity and efficacy of prayer; he had a great attraction for it, and corresponded so faithfully with this grace, that his mind, his heart, his actions, and all the time *he had at his* disposal were devoted to this holy exer-

cise. For as St. Bonaventure says, whether in or out of his convent, walking or sitting, working or reposing, his mind was always fixed on God; he seemed rather to dwell in heaven than on earth. Although he had such facility in prayer, that all times and places were convenient for it, still he loved to retire into solitude, that he might be more recollected, and there giving free vent to devout affections he poured forth floods of tears, and the woods reëchoed his sobs and groans. Sometimes he would address God as his Lord, at others as his judge; now he would implore Him as a father, and again he would speak familiarly with Him as with an intimate friend; oftener still he would weep bitterly over the Passion of Christ, which he seemed to behold with his eyes. From vocal or mental prayer he frequently passed to contemplation, in which he was specially favoured by God. His companions attest to have seen him rapt in ecstasy and wholly abstracted, having all the powers of his soul absorbed in God, and raised a prodigious height from the ground. It was in these sublime contemplations that the secrets of divine wisdom were revealed to him, and that he was favoured with apparitions of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, angels, and saints. What graces did Francis ask in these long and fervent prayers? St. Bonaventure says that, distrusting himself and confiding solely in the goodness and mercy of God, he asked for light and grace to direct all his words and actions according to the divine will, and that his Order might increase and flourish; above all, he prayed for the salvation of souls and conversion of sinners. He always assisted at the community prayers, and at the recital of the divine office in choir, and although filled with fervour and devotion, he carefully abstained from giving any exterior sign of

the fire of divine love which consumed him; and if at that time he received any extraordinary favour from God, he did his utmost to conceal it. Such was the spirit of prayer possessed by Francis, and the prudence with which he endeavoured not to lose any of the merit attached to it.

Third Point.—Prayer, my brethren, is of strict obligation, and one from which we can never excuse ourselves under any pretext whatsoever. If prayer is indispensable to all the faithful, how can a religious, who has devoted his life to piety and devotion, who has entered the cloister to sanctify his soul and the souls of others, dare to neglect it? The faithful constantly recommend themselves to our prayers, having great confidence in them, esteeming us to be men of God and to have their salvation at heart. This applies to simple religious. How much more necessary is prayer to superiors, who cannot hope without it to obtain the graces they require, intrusted as they are with the government and care of souls of which they will have to render a strict account to God! Confessors will find in prayer alone the light necessary to enable them to act with prudence and charity in this difficult ministry, which one of the holy Fathers of the Church calls the 'art of arts.' Preachers will find their words fall unheeded and remain unproductive in the hearts of the faithful, unless they water them by fervent and constant prayer. How can they expect to enkindle the fire of divine love in the breasts of others when their own are cold and hard? Science and eloquence will be fruitless without mental prayer, in which, as the Holy Spirit tells us, the fire of zeal for God's glory and the salvation of souls is enkindled. '*A religious*,' says our seraphic Father, 'should desire

above all things to possess the spirit of prayer; I believe that without this we cannot obtain any special graces from God, nor make any great progress in His holy service. When we feel sad or disturbed in mind, we should at once have recourse to prayer, and implore our Heavenly Father to restore to us the joy of His salvation.'

EXAMPLE.

If we desire a proof of the great love Francis had for prayer, we shall find it in the following fact. In the first years of his conversion he was much perplexed by doubts concerning the mode of life he was to follow. And in order to act with becoming prudence in a matter of such importance he consulted those religious with whom he was accustomed to converse familiarly, proposing to them his difficulty in the following terms: 'What do you advise, brethren? Which seems to you the best, that I should give myself entirely to prayer, or devote my time to preaching? for I, a poor simple man, slow of speech, have received the grace of prayer rather than of preaching. In prayer we gain much, because it is the source of graces; in preaching we distribute to others what we have received from God. Prayer purifies our heart and affections, unites us to the only true and sovereign good, and consolidates our virtue. In preaching our souls are covered with the dust of imperfections, owing to the great distractions and relaxation of religious discipline attending that employment. In prayer we speak to God, and listen to His voice; we converse with the angels as if we were already their associates. In preaching we must use great condescension towards men, and living amongst creatures we must speak, think, see, and hear human things. But there is one thing which makes

gious silence. Without solitude and silence there will be no progress in the spiritual life; these are the two means which the saints and all pious souls make use of to protect and increase their virtue; herein they conceived those great designs for the edification of the Church and the good of society, which they afterwards so ably and successfully carried out. Our Divine Master Himself prepared in the silence and solitude of the desert for the great work of teaching His heavenly doctrine and of redeeming mankind; not, certainly, that He had need of it, but to give us an example. It was in the silence and solitude of the desert that SS. Paul, Anthony, and Basil originated those monastic foundations, where numbers, especially in Egypt and the Thebaid, led lives more angelic than human. In the silence and solitude of Palestine, St. Jerome acquired that profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which has merited for him the title of the Great Doctor. In the silence and solitude of Subiaco and Monte Cassino, St. Benedict planned the introduction of the monasticism of the East into the West, and succeeded so admirably, that the benefits which the Church and society at large have received from his children will always evoke the gratitude of the faithful. In the solitude and silence of Clairvaux, St. Bernard, with his great mind and magnanimous and generous heart, ruled the destinies of Europe in that century of darkness and error. In the silence and solitude of Manresa, St. Ignatius conceived the immense and difficult design of instituting an Order, destined to oppose the infernal hydra of Protestantism, which had already overrun a great part of Europe.

Second Point.—The same means were adopted by *Francis,* who was inferior to none of the heroes of

Christianity in what he undertook for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the benefit of mankind. After he had been called by God to a more perfect life he would often retire into poor deserted country churches, such, for example, as St. Mary of Angels, or St. Damian's, and there spend whole nights in prayer. When he had gathered his first disciples around him he took them to a solitary hut, near a little stream named Rivotorto, in the neighbourhood of Assisi, where they remained for some time unknown to the world. In choosing a site for his convents, he would always fix upon country places, far from the noise and bustle of cities. On arriving at a convent, he would seek out a lonely spot in the woods, where he could pass the night in contemplation. He preferred Mount Alvernia to any other place, always excepting our Lady of Angels, because it was far from the haunts of men, and, as he said, well adapted to penance and prayer; he loved to dwell there, and received marvellous heavenly favours in that solitude. When the glory of God, or the good of his neighbour obliged him to mix with the world and to converse with men, he knew so well how to keep his mind and heart recollected, that he was often totally unaware of what was passing around him. The earnestness with which he recommended solitude and silence to his religious was in proportion to his love for it. When he sent them two and two to preach to the world, he said to them, amongst other things, 'Go in the name of the Lord, two and two, with humility and modesty; observe most strict silence in the morning until the hour of Tierce, and devote that time to prayer. Never let idle or useless words be heard amongst you; your conduct on your journeys should be as humble and recollected as

if you were in a hermitage, or in your cell. Wherever we may be, or wheresoever we may go, we have our cell always with us; our brother the body is the cell, and the soul is the hermit who dwells therein, in order to meditate and pray; if the soul of a religious cannot remain peaceably in the cell of the body, exterior solitude will avail it nothing.' In another place he says, 'Blessed is that religious who finds his happiness and joy in pious conferences and good works, which lead a soul to love God with joy and gladness. Woe to that religious who takes delight in frivolous and idle talk, and who provokes others to laughter.'

Third Point.—If we earnestly desire, my brethren, to attain perfection in the state to which God has called us, we must cherish these two virtues, or rather these two guardians of all the other virtues, silence and solitude, which were so strongly recommended to us by our seraphic Father. As for silence, a religious or any devout person who cannot bridle his tongue will never do any good; the Holy Spirit tells us this in many places of the Bible. For example: 'He that useth many words shall hurt his own soul,' 'In the multitude of words there shall not want sin,' and so on. But woe to the religious if—which God forbid!—besides indulging in vain and frivolous discourse, he make use of his tongue to wound his brethren or his neighbour, as too often happens to great talkers; for, as St. James says, 'If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain.' Nor is the love for solitude less necessary to a religious; not that he should remain always shut up in his cloister, without ever going out. O, no; let him go where the glory of God, the *good of his* neighbour, or duties of his office call him,

or even to take innocent recreation. But he should not wander about here and there, seeking for the news of the day, or discussing the affairs of seculars, or, worse still, contracting particular friendships with them. In such a case he would be a religious in name only, and dishonour the habit he wears. How can any one who exposes himself to so many dangerous occasions hope to preserve his mind and heart unsullied? If his thoughts are constantly occupied with secular amusements and vanities, and with the business of this world, will not his heart become attached to these pleasures? How will he be able to fulfil the duties of his state, to attend to prayer, to divine office, to study, while his mind is thus dissipated and his thoughts wandering? He will find it almost impossible. 'As often as I have been amongst men,' said one, 'I have returned less a man.' The wise man justly compares a religious out of his monastery to a bird, which, leaving its nest, is soon caught. St. Bernard says, 'A religious who desires to be saved should despise the world, and remain within the precincts of his monastery.'

Example.

Let us now see how our holy Father loved silence and solitude, and how he strove to imitate the hidden life of Christ. Being one Carnival time in the convent of Celle, near Cortona, he was inspired by God to pass the time of Lent on a desert island in the lake of Perugia, which was not far distant. Leaving the care of the convent to Brother Silvester, without, however, telling him what he meant to do, he provided himself with two loaves, and begged a boatman, who was a worthy man and a great friend of his, to take him to this island early in the morning of Ash Wednesday, *praying him* not to let any one know where he was,

and to return for him on Wednesday in Holy Week. Being left thus quite alone, and there being no dwelling on the island in which he could take shelter, he entered a thick part of the wood all overgrown with brambles and other creeping plants, and forming, as it were, a kind of hut, and there he began to pray and give himself to contemplation. He passed the whole Lent in this solitude, without taking any other food than half of one of the loaves he had brought with him. It is presumed that St. Francis ate this half-loaf out of respect to our Blessed Lord, who fasted forty days and forty nights without taking any material food; for by eating this bit of bread he put aside the temptation to vain-glory, and yet fasted forty days and nights in imitation of the Saviour. The boatman went, according to his promise, to fetch him, on Wednesday in Holy Week. As he was passing over the lake a great storm arose, which our holy Father instantly quelled by making the sign of the cross over the water, reminding us of our Divine Redeemer on the Lake of Genesareth. He then went to his convent, and passed the remainder of Holy Week with his religious. The boatman, who had witnessed the marvellous fast of the saint, thought it well to make it known, and spread the report amongst the people, who hastened in great numbers to the island to see and venerate the hut where St. Francis had resided. The miracles which were performed in that place by the merits of the saint induced many pious persons to take up their abode there, and in time a good-sized village was formed. A convent and church were afterwards erected in honour of St. Francis in that place, and the spring, from which he used to draw water, was blessed with *healing* powers.

Maxim of the Saint.

'He who remains in solitude is free from three temptations—seeing, hearing, and murmuring.'

Prayer.

O Lord, the account which we shall have to render to Thee of every idle word fills us with fear, since we have uttered so many, not merely idle, but sinful, words, by which we have offended against charity, and displeased Thy infinite majesty. Pardon, we beseech Thee, all the faults we have committed by the tongue. We say from our hearts with the royal prophet, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words, to make excuses in sin with men that work iniquity.' Since in Thine infinite mercy Thou hast called us religious to dwell in Thy holy house, grant that we may never, even in affection, return to the evil world from which Thou hast drawn us; that, finding true peace and consolation in Thy tabernacles in the company of our religious brethren, we may spend the short time of our lives in joy and happiness, until we come to dwell eternally with Thee in our heavenly country. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE LOVE ST. FRANCIS HAD FOR PEACE.

First Point.—At the very first moment of His birth the Son of God proclaimed through His angels, 'Peace upon earth to men of good-will.' He came, having assumed our human nature, in order to reconcile man with God, and during His life He everywhere preached peace. He wished to be called the Prince of Peace; He said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.' 'Go in peace' was the usual way in which He dismissed those whom He had cured. 'Peace be with you' was the salutation with which He greeted His Apostles and disciples, and He commanded them to use the like when they entered into any house. When about to die He thus addressed His sorrowing disciples, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world giveth do I give to you.' What a great blessing must this peace, this tranquillity of soul be, since the Son of God was so enamoured of it! St. Ephrem, paraphrasing this saying of the Holy Ghost in the book of Proverbs, 'Better is a dry morsel with joy than a house full of victims with strife,' exclaims, 'O peace, how easily a religious advances, possessed of thee! O peace, school for heaven; O peace, way to eternal life! O peace, mother of compunction! O peace, friend of penance! O peace, mirror of sinners, in which a man sees clearly his iniquities! O peace, which restrains not tears! O peace, which generates meekness! O peace, companion of humility! O peace, which conducts man to true happiness; thou art the

strength of the soul; a sweet yoke and light burden, refreshing and supporting those who bear thee! Thou joy of the mind and heart; guardian of the eyes, ears, and tongue; destroyer of licentiousness, and enemy to vice; source of religion and piety; prison of the passions; aid to all virtues; friend of voluntary poverty; fruitful field of Christ! O peace, in the fear of the Lord thou art the wall and the defence of all those who are striving to attain the kingdom of heaven!' It is not necessary for us to add anything to these praises of peace, that great good to which we all aspire, although we are not always willing to make the sacrifices necessary to obtain it, or to preserve it when obtained.

Second Point.—This virtue also Francis possessed in so great a degree that he may well be called the apostle of peace. In this we find another striking resemblance to the King of Peace, who came upon earth to bestow it upon us. Any one who has even a slight knowledge of history must be aware that in the days when Francis lived tyranny, discord, and vengeance reigned throughout the world, especially in Italy. Every page of that nation's history is stained with blood, and that not of a foreign enemy, but of brethren and fellow-citizens; so that we turn away in horror, and thank God and St. Francis that in this respect at least the times in which we live are far superior. Yes, we should thank St. Francis, because he, inflamed with the love of God and his neighbour, and most gentle and loving by nature, began from the very outset of his conversion to preach peace to the angry people. St. Bonaventure says that at the beginning of every sermon he preached he would salute *the audience* with this formula, 'May the Lord grant

you His peace;' and during his discourse he would many times revert to this topic. At the commencement of almost all his letters he desires peace to those whom he addresses. If he heard of any place where discord reigned he would immediately go there, and could never rest until he had succeeded in restoring concord; and he induced many persons, even of great and noble families, and also entire cities and districts, to live in peace and harmony. When he sent his first disciples to preach the Gospel, he said to them, 'Arise, my children, traverse the world, and preach peace to men.' And later on, when their number was increased, he gave them many beautiful admonitions, amongst which were the following: 'Go, announce peace to all, and whilst preaching it with your lips take care to have it still more in your hearts. Let no one be moved to anger on your account, or receive scandal from you; but endeavour to lead all to peace, benignity, and concord, by the example of your meekness.' And to his religious he gives this advice: 'I exhort all my brethren in Jesus Christ not to quarrel or dispute, but to be gentle, peaceable, meek, and humble. Into whatever house they enter let them say, "Peace be to this house!"' We see well that every word and every act of Francis is animated by love for holy peace—peace with God, peace with men, peace with himself, peace everywhere and at all times.

Third Point.—Let us, my brethren, follow the advice of our most loving Father, who by word and example so constantly recommends peace to us. We must, however, remember that it is not so much a virtue in itself as the reward of virtue, and that if we desire to enjoy it and to impress it upon others, we must *in the first* place be at peace with God. For instance,

if our conscience reproach us with any transgression, if we have been wanting in our duty as Christians or as religious, we must at once beg pardon of God and resolve to be more exact and faithful in future; because peace cannot dwell with sin, as our Lord tells us through Isaias, 'there is no peace for the wicked.' But if we are assured, as far as may be, by the testimony of our conscience that we are on the right road, let us be careful not to stray either to the right or to the left, and thus we shall always enjoy peace; for our Lord says again by the mouth of the royal prophet, 'much peace have they that love Thy law.' Let us jealously and carefully guard this virtue, remembering that discord, resentments, and disputes are easily raised even amongst those who ought to be the most zealous promoters of peace, and in those places where it should reign unbroken, and, what is still more to be regretted, from the most frivolous causes. Let us willingly bear affronts and injuries for the love of peace. Let us watch over ourselves that we may never be the occasion of dissensions; and if such occur amongst others, let us be peacemakers; for in a religious community or a Christian family, if peace depart all other blessings depart with it. If we endeavour to acquire charity, patience, and humility, we shall possess peace; and thus being at peace with God, with our own conscience; and with our brethren we shall be well fitted to recommend it to others, and we may rest assured that our words will bear much fruit.

Example.

Let us listen to the account given us by an eye-witness of the wonderful effect of the preaching of Francis when he announced peace to men. 'I, Thomas,

a native of Spalatro, and archdeacon of the cathedral church of that city, was studying in Bologna during the year 1220. On the feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady I was present at a sermon preached by St. Francis in the square opposite the little palace, where nearly all the citizens were assembled. He began his discourse in this manner, "Angels, men, and demons." He spoke so eloquently and so earnestly on these three subjects, that many learned men who had come to hear him were astonished to find a poor simple man speak so well. The saint did not draw out the different points as preachers usually do; but turning his discourse entirely upon one point, he referred everything to this one end, viz. the reëstablishment of peace, concord, and Christian charity, which was then utterly destroyed by inveterate enmities and dissensions. Francis was dressed in a poor habit, his face was thin and emaciated, and he was of insignificant stature; but God gave such power to his words, that he reconciled a number of gentlemen who were exceedingly enraged against each other, and whose quarrels had caused great bloodshed and disorder. The love and veneration which all felt for the saint were so great and so universal, that numbers of men and women crowded round him, esteeming themselves happy to be able to touch even the hem of his habit.' Such is the marvellous influence of those who possess peace and preach it to others.

Maxim of the Saint.

'The true servant of God is never disturbed, never angry.'

Prayer.

O God of peace and of all consolation, grant, we

beseech Thee, that we may never by our sins or transgressions lose Thy friendship and incur Thy anger. Grant us in all things to acknowledge Thy infinite wisdom, and to submit to Thy holy will, so that neither temptations, nor sufferings, nor misfortunes, nor even our frailty may ever disturb the tranquillity of our soul. Give us patience to bear with the disagreeable, to compassionate the imperfect, and charitably to correct and admonish the guilty, that so we may dwell in peace with our brethren. Finally, we say with Holy Church, 'Give us peace, O Lord, in these our days, for there is none other to fight for us, but Thee, our God.' Grant that, having enjoyed on earth the peace promised to men of good-will, we may hereafter attain to the enjoyment of that full and perfect peace which consists in loving and praising Thee for ever and ever. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

ON THE PROFOUND RESPECT ST. FRANCIS HAD FOR CHURCHES AND FOR HOLY THINGS.

First Point.—If, my brethren, we had a lively faith and an ardent love for God and for the august mystery of the altar, how great would be our respect for churches and for all sacred things! If the ark of the covenant, which was only a symbol of the alliance of God with man; if the tabernacle, which represented the presence of God upon earth; if the temple, which

was substituted for the tabernacle, and, like it, signified the divine presence, and was, at one and the same time, the house of prayer and the place for sacrifice; if any other type of the predilection and protection of the Most High were, not alone objects of profound respect and veneration to the Israelites, but sources of inexpressible joy, so that they rightly considered themselves the most fortunate nation on earth in possessing them, what should we Catholic Christians think of our churches, which are not mere symbols or types of the presence of God amongst us, but the places where He abides really and personally until the end of time? Here, indeed, sacrifices are offered,—not the figurative and imperfect ones of the Jewish law, but the one true and perfect Sacrifice in which the Son of God immolates Himself each day for our sins. The church is the house of prayer, so holy and so venerable that it only differs from heaven in this: that here God is present with us under the veil of faith, and there we shall see Him face to face as He is. Ah, we Christians may well exclaim, with the patriarch Jacob, when he saw the mysterious ladder that touched the heavens, 'How terrible is this place! this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven.' We may also exclaim, with the royal prophet, 'How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord; they shall praise Thee for ever and ever; for better is one day in Thy courts above thousands.' If, my brethren, we have a firm and lively faith, that will suffice to inspire us with great reverence for the house of God. With what sentiments of respect and love should we *not enter* the holy house, where the Incarnate Word

assumed our human nature, or the stable where He was born! with what devotion and veneration should we not prostrate ourselves on Mount Calvary, where He was crucified, or in the holy sepulchre where His sacred Body was laid, or at any of the holy places where He dwelt on earth, if we had the happiness of visiting them! These spots are certainly most holy and deserving of respect; but still they are only memorials and remembrances of Christ, and, therefore, far inferior to the poorest church, ciborium, or sacred vessel in which the Holy Eucharist is preserved.

Second Point.—St. Francis, having been chosen by God to sustain the spiritual Church of Christ upon earth by his preaching and that of his children, had received from Him a great love and respect for material churches, in which God abides with us. At the very beginning of his more perfect life he was filled with this great love and devotion to the house of God, as he himself says, 'Our Love gave me such a lively faith and love for churches that I used to adore Him in these words, "We adore Thee, O most holy Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Thy churches throughout the world, and we bless Thee, because, by Thy holy cross, Thou hast redeemed the world."' It was whilst he was praying in the poor half-ruined church of St. Damian that he heard the voice of God saying to him, 'Go, Francis, and build up My house, which is falling into ruin.' Understanding this command literally he applied himself to the work with incredible ardour. There was not even a lamp in this church, and to procure one he sold a horse and a large piece of cloth; then he begged throughout the city, joyfully bearing scoffs, ridicule, and even blows. He worked at it with his own hands, carrying the stones and mortar

on his shoulders, until he had completed the repairs. He then at once turned his attention to another church dedicated to St. Peter, the purity of his faith inspiring him with a great devotion to the Prince of the Apostles; and this time the work was easier, as the good use he had made of former alms induced people to give more plentifully. But even then he was not satisfied; he wished to restore a third church, thus foreshowing, as St. Bonaventure tells us, the three Orders he was to found. This time he made choice of one a mile distant from Assisi, which was in so dilapidated a condition as to be only used by shepherds as a place of shelter from the rain; it was known by the name of St. Mary of Angels or Portiuncula, and became the mother of all the churches of the Order. The zeal which Francis showed at the very beginning of his spiritual life for the honour of God's house was surpassed by his after labours in the same cause. We know that when he found a neglected church, especially in the country, he would sweep and clean it, and, to the best of his power, ornament it. Fearing that Hosts might be wanting for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, or that they might not be carefully prepared, he would make great numbers himself, with beautiful impressions, and would take them to churches that required them. This piety he extended also to everything that concerned the sacred mysteries, and commanded his children to imitate his example.

Third Point.—What a beautiful lesson, O my brethren, may we learn from the great care which St. Francis had of churches and holy things! He teaches us thereby that we also should endeavour, to the best of our power, to keep our churches, altars, sacred vessels, vestments, and all that belongs to the divine

worship, clean, and in good order; so that, although poor, they may yet be fit for the celebration of the august mysteries of our holy religion. What a disgrace, nay, what a sin, it would be for religious or devout seculars to provide themselves with neat well-furnished rooms, to keep their convent or their house well swept and scrupulously clean, and yet to give themselves no trouble for the cleansing and ornamenting of the house of God! We may also learn from our holy Father to interest ourselves in the decoration of churches that do not in any way belong to us. It often happens, especially in country places, that, like St. Francis, we come across churches which, either through poverty, or injuries from the weather, or more often, alas, through the negligence of those who have charge of them, are unfit to be the temples of God, or even the abodes of men or of brute beasts. If we have not courage to put them in order ourselves, as our holy Father used to do, we may at least endeavour, by admonitions and entreaties, and by every means in our power, to move those to whom they belong to do so. Above all, we should endeavour to promote love and reverence for the house of God, and all belonging to it. When we see the irreverences, profanations, and scandals which, in these days of incredulity and religious indifference, are boldly perpetrated in our holy temples, let us, especially if we are priests, fearlessly raise our voices, full of holy zeal, like David or Mathathias, prudently reminding those guilty of these sacrileges of the terrible threats of God. Let us recall to their minds how Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who never made use of harsh measures, could not restrain His indignation when He beheld the profanations committed in the Temple, which was but a figure of our

churches, driving out the guilty with a scourge of cords.

EXAMPLE.

We shall understand still better the spirit which animated St. Francis, if we read the letter which he addressed to all ecclesiastics. 'Because I am obliged to serve all the world, and that I cannot now on account of my infirmities *come* to you, to fulfil my obligations in person, I implore you to receive this letter with all love and charity, and to hearken to the advice I give you in these few words. Let us ecclesiastics consider what great sins and ignorance men are guilty of towards the sacred Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and against the sacred words by which they are consecrated, for we know that His sacred Body and Blood are not present until the words of consecration are pronounced. We have nothing and we can see nothing of God in this world, excepting the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and His sacred words, by which we have been redeemed, as well as created. Let all those engaged in the sacred ministry, especially those who are apt to act carelessly, consider how vile are often the chalices used for consecration, as also the corporals and other linen used at the altar; how unworthily the sacred Body of our Lord is often treated—how it is left in improper places, irreverently carried, disrespectfully received, and carelessly administered. Many times, also, we find His holy name and His written word trampled under foot. So true it is that the carnal man cannot understand spiritual things. Shall we not grieve over these outrages, remembering how lovingly He gives Himself to us, how He leaves Himself in our hands, how we touch Him and receive *Him every* day in Holy Communion? Have we for-

gotten that we shall one day fall into His hands? Let us at once courageously amend these faults, and all the others of which we may be guilty, and whenever we find the sacred Body of Jesus Christ neglected, or disrespectfully treated, let us remove it to a carefully prepared place. And if we find the name or the written words of our Lord thrown about, let us collect them and put them away respectfully. We know that we are bound to do these things by the precepts of God and the decrees of our Holy Mother the Church. Let him who neglects this remember that he will have to render a strict account thereof at the day of judgment.

Maxim of the Saint.

'I desire that the most holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ be kept in costly tabernacles.'

Prayer.

If our faith were more lively, if we were more anxious to promote thy honour and glory, O Lord—if we understood better the greatness of the sacred ministry, we should be more diligent in cleansing and adorning Thy house, we should strive to prevent the sacrileges and profanations which are so constantly committed by irreligious persons, we should treat holy things with respect, and we priests should avoid many imperfections in the celebration of Holy Mass and the exercise of our priestly functions. Pardon, we beseech Thee, our negligence and want of devotion, and enkindle in our hearts the fire of faith and of zeal for Thy glory, that, being worthy ministers of Thy Church militant upon earth, we may come to reign for ever triumphantly with Thee in heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE GREAT RESPECT ST. FRANCIS HAD FOR PRIESTS AND ECCLESIASTICAL SUPERIORS.

First Point.—How great, my brethren, is the dignity of a Catholic priest! In virtue of the power given him by Jesus Christ at His last supper they can each day call Him down upon the altar, to be mystically sacrificed anew to His Father for our sins. In virtue of the same power they can release sinners from their bonds, and reconcile them to God. They are appointed depositaries and teachers of the true faith, and sentence of eternal death is pronounced against those who refuse to hearken to their words. Placed as mediators between heaven and earth, they by their prayers avert the anger of God. Having the care of souls, they watch over them from the cradle to the tomb. In a word, as vicars and ministers of Christ, they continue, until the end of time, the work of redemption. It is no wonder, then, that our Divine Redeemer, who has raised priests to this sublime dignity, should regard them as the apple of His eye; should wish us to hear them as we would hear Him; should consider any insult offered to them as offered to Himself; or that He calls them the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and even so many gods. The eloquent discourses made by the Fathers of the Church on the greatness of the priestly office are no matter of surprise to us; nor are we astonished to hear St. Chrysostom assert that nothing can equal it upon this earth—nay, that it is superior even to angelic *dignity, and* that, properly speaking, it is divine. In

these our days, alas, we find Catholics who do not reverence the priesthood as they ought, and this lamentable indifference arises from want of faith, and from the increase of rationalism and irreligion, whereby men, being unwilling to recognise the supernatural and divine character of the priest, necessarily lose the respect due to his sublime office.

Second Point.—Most elevated was the idea St. Francis formed of priests, and unbounded was his veneration for them. His conduct through life bears witness to the profound respect in which he held all the Prelates, Cardinals, and Bishops of the Holy Roman Church, always acting towards them with obedience and submission, as he did even to the poorest and most ignorant priests, because of the sublime power they possessed over the real and mystic Body of Christ. Let us hear what he says on this point. 'Our Lord gave me so much faith in priests that live according to the rules of the Roman Catholic Church, on account of their office, that even if they were to persecute me still I would have recourse to them. And if I were as wise as Solomon I would not preach in churches belonging to the poorest priests against their will. I wish to fear, love, and honour them as my masters, and I will not see sin in them, because I recognise in their persons the Son of God, and I regard them as my lords.' In another place, speaking to his religious, he says, 'We have been called by God to assist the prelates and the clergy of Holy Church in the great work of faith. We are obliged, therefore, to honour them, and to show them all possible respect. The Friars Minor bear this name on purpose that they may really be the least and the humblest amongst men.' St. Bonaventure relates that he was wont to say, 'If I were to meet a saint come down from

heaven and a priest at the same moment, I would first kiss the priest's hand and then turn to do honour to the saint.' And we are told that he would kneel down and kiss the ground whereon a priest had trod.

Third Point.—Let us (especially we priests, secular or regular), seriously consider that we are all members, though differing in rank, of the Catholic Church, of which the invisible head is Jesus Christ, and the visible head on earth is the Roman Pontiff; and that we are therefore obliged to fulfil most exactly our own ministry, and avoid whatever might disturb the other members in the discharge of their respective functions; but, according to the admonition of St. Paul, let us all, being subordinate to our head, and united amongst ourselves, mutually assist one another. This union should be still more intimate between religious Orders, who are like so many battalions of the great Christian army, differing, maybe, in discipline and device, but all fighting under the same banner of the cross, with the same leader at their head, the Sovereign Pontiff; always ready to defend, according to the spirit of their own institute, the Church of Christ, which will never be free from enemies to the end of time. From these comparisons we can clearly understand how necessary it is for us to be firmly united by the bond of charity; subordinate one to another, according to the office and position held by each; bearing with each other without envy, but rather rejoicing if we see others excelling us in doing good; in fine, behaving as loving brothers in Jesus Christ and as docile and respectful sons of Holy Church. If we do otherwise, besides the detriment to our own soul, we shall hinder much good, give scandal to the faithful, who look to us as models for their *imitation*, and furnish the enemies of the Church with

good reason to abuse and calumniate the sacerdotal order.

EXAMPLE.

Amongst the religious assembled at the famous Chapter of Mats there were many who had gone there in order to obtain redress for the ill-treatment they had received in many places on the other side of the Alps. For this they gave two principal reasons—first, they had no letters to show that their institute had been approved by the Roman Pontiff; and secondly, because the priests would not allow them to preach in their parishes. For this cause they besought the holy patriarch to obtain letters-patent from the Pope certifying the approval of the Order, and empowering them to preach wherever they thought proper, without the permission of the Bishop. The holy founder, however, could not hear this second proposal without a certain feeling of indignation. 'O brethren,' he said, 'are you without understanding that you know not the will of God? He desires us to gain first the superiors by respect and humility, and afterwards the subjects by word and example. When the Bishops see that you are humble and submissive they will entreat you, of their own accord, to labour with them for the salvation of their flock—they will urge their people to attend your instructions and to be guided by your advice. Our greatest privilege should be to have no privilege which can make us proud, or cause us to do any injury to others or create discord and dissensions. We will only ask from the Apostolic See that assistance which we need to enable us to serve God, to propagate the faith, and to gain souls, with the consent of their prelates, without occasioning disorder in their diocese.' Others represented to him that some of the parish priests had refused to allow

them to preach or to receive any temporal assistance, and that they had been unable by any means to gain their good-will. To these St. Francis answered, 'My brethren, we are sent to assist secular priests in their ministry. Each one will be rewarded, not according to his rank, but according to his works. Labouring for the salvation of souls is a thing most pleasing to God, and we shall be more likely to succeed in our endeavours if we act in union with the priests. If they decline our coöperation, God, to whom alone vengeance belongs, will in His own good time give them what they deserve. Be ever submissive to ecclesiastical superiors, so as to avoid exciting any feelings of jealousy. If you are the children of peace you will secure the affection of both priest and people, which will be far more pleasing to God than if you gained the people and displeased the priest. Endeavour always to hide the faults of clerics, to supply their deficiencies, and to advance constantly in humility.' This teaches us the respect, prudence, and moderation of Francis towards priests and ecclesiastical superiors.

Maxim of the Saint.

'Blessed is he who confides in the priests who live according to the rules of Holy Church; and woe to him who despises them.'

Prayer.

If we knew better, O Lord, the sublime dignity to which by Thy gratuitous goodness we, Thy ministers, have been raised; if we fulfilled more carefully the strict obligations imposed upon us by this favour, how much greater would be our respect for our brethren in the ministry and in religion! If we had more humility and charity we should have more patience and com-

passion for their weakness, and we should not seek to be preferred before them. Give us, O Lord, a humble and docile spirit, and a real knowledge of our sublime character, that we may render to each other true marks of respect, obedience, and love, and live always in peace and unity, offering to the faithful a perfect model of that holy Christian brotherhood, which, being begun upon earth, will be completed in heaven, where we hope one day to arrive, through Thy mercy. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

TENDER DEVOTION OF ST. FRANCIS TO OUR BLESSED LADY.

First Point.—'What mortal man,' exclaims our devout St. Bernardin, 'unless supported by the divine oracles, would presume with polluted lips to name, or even to speak, of her who is the true Mother of God and our mother, who was predestined by the Eternal Father from all eternity to be a most pure virgin, whom the Son chose for His Mother, whom the Holy Ghost adorned with all graces for His indwelling?' I own, my brethren, that this great saint is right in what he says; still you must allow me to remind you that Mary is our mother, and also our co-redemptrix. She is our mother, because, as St. Bonaventure tells us, she has two kinds of children—one, her only One, according to the flesh, which is the Man-God; and the others, according to the spirit and adoption, which are all the

faithful. She gave birth to these on the summit of Mount Calvary, in the midst of sorrow and affliction, when she received us all as her children in the person of St. John. She also assisted in the work of our redemption; for as Eve was the companion of Adam's sin, and therefore of the ruin of the world, so Mary was the companion of Jesus in the destruction of sin and the salvation of mankind. St. Epiphanius tells us that as Eve brought death into the world, so Mary brings life, because of her was born the Son of God, the Light of the world. Her love for us as far surpasses that of any earthly mother as she is superior to them in excellence and dignity. She teaches us the science of the saints and of divine things, and points out to us the straight and sure way to our heavenly country. From her we learn that chaste and holy love and fear of God without which we can never attain eternal life. She inspires us with hope, and inflames the soul with desires of that immense good which 'eye hath not seen, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.' She will be a mother to us if we are her faithful children. And as our co-redemptrix what does she not do for the increase and conservation of the mystical body of Christ, of which we are members? She is the mistress of Apostles and doctors, the strength of martyrs, the guide of confessors, the model of virgins. She conquers our spiritual enemies, destroys heresies, and protects the Universal Church; in a word, she is *all* to us, for to her apply those words of the Holy Ghost: 'He who finds me finds life, and shall obtain salvation from the Lord.'

Second Point.—We learn from St. Bonaventure the immense love and devotion of our holy Father for our *Blessed Lady*. It was his love for Mary which inspired

him to repair the little church of our Lady of Angels. And when this spot was afterwards given to him by the Benedictines he named it the mistress and mother of all the churches of the Order, principally for this reason, that it was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. He had a particular affection for this place, because it had been revealed to him that it was especially dear to Mary, and he would have wished never to leave it. One night when he was praying there, recommending his little flock to her care, our Lady appeared to him with her Divine Son and numbers of angels, and after this vision he exclaimed, 'Truly this is a holy place, which should be inhabited by angels rather than by men! I will never leave this place; it will be to me and my children a perpetual monument of the divine goodness!' For this reason he desired that his heart should be buried there. He placed his whole Order under her powerful protection, choosing her for its special patroness and advocate, and placing in her, after God, all his hopes; for he said, 'It is through her that the God of infinite majesty has become our Brother, and that we have obtained mercy.' In order to excite all to have great confidence in her, he would often repeat these words of St. Bernard, 'In danger, in trouble, in doubt, invoke Mary, think of Mary; let her name be ever in thy heart and on thy tongue.' He observed each year a rigorous Lent in her honour from the feast of SS. Peter and Paul until the Assumption. One of the first things which he established in the great Chapter of Mats was that a solemn Mass should be celebrated every Saturday in all the churches of the Order in honour of the Blessed Virgin.

Third Point.—Besides the many claims which the Blessed Virgin has on the love and veneration of all

the faithful, we, the children of the seraphic Father, have many special reasons for honouring her. We have seen what a singular and tender devotion St. Francis had towards her; and if we desire to be his true followers we must imitate him in this respect. He himself has placed us under her protection, and we must ever regard her as our advocate and patroness. We should be ungrateful children, if we did not show her special marks of love and confidence and repose in her love and protection. Our fathers and predecessors in the Order, obeying the wishes of their holy patriarch, have ever been distinguished for the zeal with which, by preaching and writing, they strove to promote her honour. To mention one or two amongst many: Duns Scotus, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardin of Sienna, and in these days very many members of our Order have written so eloquently upon her prerogatives, that few can hope to surpass or even equal them. It has been truly said, 'that it is chiefly owing to the labours of the Franciscan Order that devotion to our Blessed Lady has reached at present the zenith of its glory.' If we would not degenerate from the piety of our ancestors, we must each endeavour to do something towards honouring her. Our fathers, imitating their holy patriarch, were the first and most zealous supporters of her Immaculate Conception, and more than six thousand Franciscan writers have defended this doctrine; this, my brethren, is the great glory of our Order, of which none can deprive us. For us was reserved the happiness of seeing these desires fulfilled by the great Pontiff Pius IX. of holy memory, who was also our brother, since he gloried in being a member of the Third Order. These considerations should surely *animate* us with a great desire to spread this devotion

amongst the faithful by every means in our power. A true Franciscan will never be satisfied with an ordinary devotion to our Blessed Lady; if he were, he would be unworthy of the name. Let us, then, endeavour to excite in ourselves an ardent love and true devotion to our Mother, and to inspire others with the same feelings towards her on whom our eternal salvation in great measure depends.

Example.

Our Blessed Lady was pleased to give her faithful servant Francis a proof how earnestly she desires our eternal salvation, in the following manner. One night, whilst he was praying with great fervour for the conversion of sinners, he was told by an angel to go to the church, where Jesus and Mary, with hosts of heavenly spirits, awaited him. Filled with joy at this announcement, he hastened thither, and prostrated himself before the Son of God and His Blessed Mother. Our Lord then said, 'Francis, on account of the great zeal which you and your children have for the salvation of souls, I will allow you to ask of Me what you will for their good and My honour.' Then Francis, almost transported out of himself, made this request: 'Most holy Father and Lord Jesus Christ, I, a most miserable sinner, pray Thee to grant me this favour, that all who shall visit this church confessed and contrite may receive a Plenary Indulgence of all their sins; and I beseech the Blessed Virgin my mother to obtain this grace for me, through her intercession.' Our Lady at once began to implore her Divine Son in his behalf, who thus answered: 'Francis, the favour you ask is a great one; but you shall receive still greater ones. Meanwhile I grant the Indulgence you have asked; but I will,

nevertheless, that you present yourself before My Vicar upon earth, to whom I have given the power of binding and loosing, and, in My name, demand it of him.' The companions of the saint heard all that passed, and they saw a great light in the church and a number of angels; but they durst not approach for reverence and great fear. The next morning, Francis forbade them to mention the occurrence to any one, and taking Brother Masseo as his companion, he went at once to Perugia, where the Sovereign Pontiff, Honorius III., then was, from whom he obtained, though not without difficulty, the confirmation of the Indulgence, limited to one day each year, which was subsequently extended by other Popes to all the churches of the Order. This is the origin of the celebrated Indulgence of Portiuncula, commonly called the Pardon of Assisi; which is a perennial memorial of the great charity of Francis and of the power of Mary's intercession.

Maxim of the Saint.

'When I say Ave Maria, Heaven smiles, the angels rejoice, the world exults, hell trembles, and the devils take to flight.'

Prayer.

Humbly prostrate at thy feet, O most holy Virgin, we praise and bless thee in the words of our seraphic Father, thy devout servant, Francis: 'Hail, Mary, Mother of God, ever a virgin, most holy lady and queen, in whom is found the fulness of grace and all good. There is none found equal to thee amongst women. Thou art the daughter and handmaid of the Eternal Father, the King of glory; He chose thee to be the Mother of His beloved Son; thou art the spouse of the *Holy Ghost*, the Paraclete. Hail, palace of God, His

tabernacle; hail, Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord; I venerate thy admirable virtues. Thou who art no less benign than beautiful, pray to thy beloved Son; conjure Him by His infinite mercy, and through His most holy Incarnation and bitter death, to grant us the pardon of our sins. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

GREAT DEVOTION OF ST. FRANCIS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

First Point.—The Holy Eucharist, my brethren, is the greatest proof of the immense and infinite love of Jesus Christ for man. According to some commentators, St. John meant this when he said: 'Before the festival day of the Pasch, Jesus knowing that His hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.' That is, He loved them with an excessive love, as St. Chrysostom explains it. What greater proof of His love could He give us? In the Holy Eucharist He gives us His true Body living as it is in heaven, with His Blood, His soul, and His divinity. What more could He give us? When did He give Himself to us? On the evening before His death, as the Apostle tells us, whilst men were plotting to take away His life, He gave Himself as food and drink: 'My Flesh,' He says, 'is meat indeed,

and My Blood is drink indeed.' 'O God,' exclaims St. Chrysostom, amazed at so great love, 'what pastor ever fed his sheep with his own flesh? But Jesus Christ feeds us with His own Body, in order intimately to unite and incorporate us with Himself.' Who will provide this banquet? In what part of the world shall we find it, and what price must we give for it? Let us not fear—any priest can prepare it for us; we can find it in even the poorest church where Mass is said, and all that is required from us is a pure conscience and a lively faith. Why does Jesus Christ give Himself to us in this Sacrament? To nourish our immortal souls: 'He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day.' Am I not right, my brethren, in saying that the Blessed Sacrament is the excess of God's love for us? Well may we exclaim with St. Augustin, 'God being infinite wisdom, in giving Himself entirely to us in this Sacrament knew not what more to give; infinitely rich, had nothing greater to give; infinite in power, could bestow no more.'

Second Point.—The soul of Francis was inflamed with a most lively and ardent devotion to the Holy Sacrament of the altar. Whenever he meditated on the infinitely tender love, on the condescending and superabundant mercy shown in this august mystery, he was rapt in ecstasies of admiration and gratitude. He communicated frequently, and with such recollection as to move the bystanders to devotion. After Holy Communion he seemed to be spiritually inebriated and transported out of himself by the ineffable sweetness which he found in this divine food. At the time of the Elevation he was wont to say the following most fervent *prayer:* 'O Heavenly Father, my Lord and my God,

look upon the face of Thy Christ; have mercy upon me and upon all sinners, for whom Thy Blessed Son our Lord deigned to die, and has willed to remain with us in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar for our salvation and consolation; who liveth and reigneth with Thee, Eternal Father, and with the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.' In his discourses, instructions, and letters, some of which were addressed to the whole world, he constantly inculcates the profound reverence which so great a Sacrament demands, the solicitude with which we should endeavour to assist at Mass, and the attention necessary to prepare for Holy Communion in order to receive it often and worthily. The respect he had for priests, the care with which he would decorate churches and look after the sacred vessels, all sprang from his love and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Although he did not pretend to be a doctor of divinity, yet he would defend this dogma against the attacks of heretics with such lucid and powerful arguments as to silence them for ever. The greatest proof, however, which we can have of his piety and ardent love for the Blessed Sacrament is the letter which he addressed to all the priests and superiors of his Order, which we insert almost entire as the third point of our meditation.

Third Point.—I conjure you, my brethren, embracing your feet with all the love of which I am capable, I implore you to show all respect and honour to the Body and Blood of Christ, by whom we have been reconciled with God the Father Almighty, and peace has been established in heaven and on earth. I beseech all my brethren who are priests, or aspiring to become such, that for the love of God, whenever they intend to say Holy Mass, they do so with simplicity and purity of

conscience, and offer the true Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with profound reverence; for just and holy motives, not from any earthly interest, or from a desire to please or fear of displeasing any one. Endeavour with the grace of God that your whole will may be directed to Him, towards the same Sovereign Lord whom only you should desire to please; for He alone acts in this Sacrifice as He pleases, according to what He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' He who doth otherwise is a traitor and another Judas. Remember, priests my brothers, that it is written in the law of Moses that the Lord commanded all those who were guilty of sacrilege to be condemned to death, even if they had only failed in external ceremony. What far more terrible punishment does he deserve who tramples under foot the Son of God, treats as unclean the Blood of the new testament by which he has been sanctified, and outrages the spirit of grace? Because a man guilty of mortal sin despises and tramples under foot the Lamb of God, this being what the Apostle calls receiving unworthily, not discerning the Body of the Lord, nor being careful to purify his conscience. Hearken to me, my brethren: if the Blessed Virgin is justly venerated for having borne in her chaste womb the Son of God; if St. John the Baptist trembled to approach Christ, and did not dare touch His sacred head to baptise Him; if the holy sepulchre in which He rested for a short time is held in such reverence, how holy, just, and worthy should they be who hold Him in their own hands, no longer mortal as He was, but immortal and glorious, on whom the angels desire to look! Consider how great is your dignity, and be ye holy, because the Lord is holy. As *in trusting* Himself to you in this mystery He has

honoured you above all others, therefore be careful to love, reverence, and honour Him in it. When you have Christ present with you in so marvellous a manner, you must confess that it would be a great misery and deplorable weakness if any earthly thing could withdraw your attention. Man is astonished, the world trembles, and the heavens rejoice when Christ the Son of the living God is within the hands of the priest at the altar. O incomprehensible greatness, O inconceivable goodness, O excess of humility! that the Sovereign of the universe, God, and Son of God, should descend so low as to hide Himself for our salvation under the species of bread! Reflect, my brethren, on the abasement of God; pour forth your hearts in His presence, humble yourselves before Him, that you may be worthy to be exalted by Him. Give yourselves entirely to Him, that He, who gives Himself to you without reserve, may take full possession of you.

EXAMPLE.

To all we have said about the love and devotion of Francis to the Holy Eucharist we may add the following. We must always bear in mind that our holy Father would never consent to be ordained priest, fearing always lest he should handle unworthily the most Holy Eucharist. One day, when he had been much pressed and urged to consent thereto, he betook himself to prayer in order to learn the will of God in his regard. Whilst he prayed, an angel appeared to him holding in his hand a vase of most clear liquid. He said, 'See, Francis, he who would worthily administer the most Holy Sacrament must be as pure as this liquid.' The humble servant of God, esteeming himself unfit for so sublime an office, resolved to remain deacon. And

he always exhorted those of his religious who were priests to humble themselves constantly in the exercise of their sacred ministry, and to acknowledge their own unworthiness and insufficiency.

Maxim of the Saint.

'I desire that the most holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ be honoured and reverenced above all things.'

Prayer.

If after studying the teaching and example of our holy Father we look into our own conscience, we are filled with shame and confusion. After so many communions, so many years of priesthood or profession, our lives ought to be angelic and our hearts burning with seraphic love; but, alas, we are still as ever cold, indevout, and full of defects. Behold, O Lord, how ill we correspond with our sublime character, and with the innumerable loving condescensions with which Thou hast favoured us. Through Thy great mercy, pardon the coldness and ingratitude of which we have been guilty; for the future, with Thy grace, it shall be otherwise. Enlighten our minds with a lively faith, inflame our hearts with an ardent love, and sanctify our inmost feelings, that we may ever worthily approach Thy holy altar; and that we may never find death where Thou hast prepared life, or incur condemnation by that which Thou hast instituted for our salvation. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ARDENT DEVOTION OF ST. FRANCIS TO THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

First Point.—Emisseno, a great saint, transported out of himself at the thought of the benefits of redemption, obtained through the Passion and death of the Son of God, exclaims, 'If, O man, the love of God in creating thee does not appear to thee sufficient proof of the value of thy soul, consider what He has done in redeeming thee.' Let us, my brethren, transport ourselves in spirit to the summit of Calvary, and behold the God-Man hanging upon an infamous gibbet between two malefactors, surrounded by an insulting crowd, who sacrilegiously mock and revile Him. See how He is wounded from head to foot, and how His Precious Blood flows in streams from His sacred Body. Let us ask Him, 'Good Jesus, for whom didst Thou shed so much blood? for whose sake dost Thou suffer so much?' And He will lovingly answer, 'To rescue your soul from the power of the devil, of whom, by your sins, you have become the slave; to cleanse it from the stains with which you have defiled it, and to restore to it that purity and beauty in which it was first created.' Again, behold Him about to die, exhausted with loss of blood, through the ever-increasing cruelty of His executioners, who have inflicted unheard-of torments upon Him. Let us ask Him once again, 'O good Jesus, Immortal King, for whom dost Thou lay down Thy life—Thou who art not only free from sin, by which alone death was incurred, but sanctity and inno-

cence itself?' 'For you,' replies the dying Saviour; 'out of the immense love I have for your souls, I have taken upon Me all your guilt, and with My most bitter Passion and death I have satisfied the justice of My Eternal Father.' This, O my brethren, is the reply of the Redeemer. Consider the excessive love of Jesus for your soul, for which He has shed His Precious Blood and endured such an ignominious death; and the love with which the Eternal Father has delivered up His only Son for your salvation, which love so astonished our St. Bonaventure, as to make him exclaim, that for love of us God seems to have hated His Son. The sacrifice of Calvary is so sublime and profound a mystery that, to those who do not ponder it in their hearts, it seems foolishness, and is a stumbling-block. St. Paul, to whom it was given to penetrate the mystery of our redemption as much as is possible to human intellect, had nothing on his lips but Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and all the saints made it the constant and favourite subject of their meditations and discourses and reflections.

Second Point.—All the saints had a great love for Jesus crucified; but Francis far surpassed them all, if we may judge from the extraordinary and unheard-of favour which he received from our Lord. This love, in a special manner, was the origin of that sublime perfection to which he attained; from this sprang that ardent desire of his making life as much as possible a copy of that of his Divine Master. To this adorable object his heart was irresistibly attracted; it was the source of all the graces he received, the model he proposed to himself in all he did. From the time when Christ spoke to him from the crucifix whilst he was *praying in* the church of St. Damian, the memory of

His sacred Passion was so impressed on his mind and heart, that whenever he thought of it (and he meditated continually on it) he could not restrain his sighs and tears. And when, on one occasion, a friend, who found him weeping, reproached him with his weakness, 'Ah, yes, I weep,' he replied; 'I weep for the sufferings of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I ought not to be ashamed to weep over them before the whole world.' And another time he said, 'My mind is so fully occupied with the consideration of the Passion of my Lord, that were I to live until the end of the world I should require no other subject for my thoughts.' Hence arose his desire of being entirely transformed into Jesus Christ by the fire of divine love; and in recompense of this his ardent longing he received this special grace, that he seemed always to be as sensible of the presence of his Divine Saviour as if he saw Him with his bodily eyes. His discourses, letters, and prayers are full of these ardent affections which he had for his Beloved, and his great desire that He should be known, loved, and imitated by all. 'Have always before your eyes, my much-loved brothers,' said he to his religious, 'the way of humility, poverty, and the holy cross, by which our Saviour Jesus Christ redeemed us, considering that if it behoved His infinite Majesty thus to suffer and so to enter into His glory, how much more ought we sinners to walk in the road of the cross and suffering. And, in truth, it follows that if every Christian is bound to carry his cross, we are still more obliged thereunto, since we profess to fight in an especial manner under this holy standard; and our Lord has chosen us, not only to carry the cross ourselves, but, by our example and teaching, to induce others to do the same, that, united with them, we may tread in the

footsteps of Jesus Christ our Leader.' Hence, in the two admirable canticles which he composed after he had received the sacred Stigmata, he proclaims, in ardent language, the overflowing love with which these miraculous wounds had inflamed his heart. Being about to render his spirit to God, the Passion of Christ was still that which entirely engrossed his thoughts, and he desired *that* part of the Gospel of St. John where it is related to be read to him. O, he indeed might well say, with the Apostle St. Paul, 'With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live; now, not I, but Christ liveth in me; and that I live now in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself for me.'

Third Point.—In Francis we have a perfect model for our imitation in the love we owe our crucified Jesus. Weak and frail as we are, we shall not be able to overtake him; nevertheless, we must run in the same way if we would arrive at the same end. Yes, if we wish to free our hearts from the tyranny of the world and the passions; if we would sweeten the miseries and sufferings of this life; if we would learn the science of the cross, and thus secure our salvation; if we would not be ungrateful to God for His many benefits, Jesus Christ crucified should be the continual subject of our meditations and prayer, and even of all our studies.

According to a great writer of our own day, St. Paul, in his words to the Corinthians, 'I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified,' intended to express his ardent quenchless hunger and thirst after the knowledge of Jesus Christ, his invincible desire to know Him as He *desires to* be known—to know Him in the most entire

and perfect manner which the intellect can grasp, the imagination conceive, or the heart aspire after; and what is this but to know Him in that unfathomable infinite act of love—His act of suffering and dying for our salvation? In the great book of the crucifix we learn the nobility of our origin, and, at the same time, our fall, which is the cause of all the evils from which we suffer. From the crucifix we learn the heinousness of our sins and the value of our soul; and it will also teach us the path we must follow in order to obtain salvation. Inspired by this book, the Apostles converted the whole world to the truths of the Gospel; martyrs generously gave their blood and their life for the faith; virgins were strengthened to observe perpetual chastity; confessors led an almost angelic life upon earth; and doctors willingly undertook the instruction of nations. Everything may be learnt from this great book if studied with the light of faith and in the spirit of Jesus Christ. The seraphic doctor St. Bonaventure being asked by the angelic doctor St. Thomas from what sources he drew his great learning and wisdom, he replied by pointing to his crucifix.

Example.

God, who had already bestowed upon St. Francis many marks of resemblance to His beloved Son, was pleased to put the finishing touch, so to speak, to this masterpiece of sanctity by impressing His seal upon him, a precious and extraordinary gift never before conceded, viz. the sacred Stigmata Many times during the course of his life St. Francis retired to Mount Alvernia, and there enjoyed special and intimate communications with God, but not in so marvellous a degree as when, in the year 1224, he went there to spend

the Lent of St. Michael, which commenced on the Assumption and lasted until the feast of the great Archangel. One day, after he had been praying long and fervently, it was revealed to him by Christ that on opening the book of the Gospel he should learn in what way he could become most acceptable to God. He said, therefore, to Brother Leo, who alone was present, 'Go, dear little sheep of God' (for so he was wont to call him), 'go to the altar, and open the book of the holy Gospel three times, in honour of the Most Holy Trinity.' Brother Leo obeyed, and each time it opened at the Passion of Christ; from which Francis understood that he was to be conformed even more than he had hitherto been to the sufferings of Christ. And although, by the great austerity of his past life, he had become very feeble in body, yet he was not terrified at this thought, but felt himself still more encouraged to suffer martyrdom, believing this to be the most perfect conformity to the Passion of Christ. His union with God became still more intimate, and his life was a perpetual ecstasy. On the feast of the Exaltation of Holy Cross, whilst he was praying in the morning on the side of the mountain, he beheld a seraph, having six wings, inflamed with the most resplendent fire, descending to him from the height of heaven. And as he flew with great swiftness towards the man of God there appeared between the wings the form of one crucified, having his hands and feet stretched out and fixed to the cross. Two wings rose above the head, two were stretched forth in flight, and two veiled the whole body. When he beheld this vision he marvelled greatly, and his heart was filled with mingled joy and sorrow; and he at once clearly understood that he was to be transformed *into* Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of

the flesh, but by the fire of love. The vision disappearing left behind it a marvellous fervour in his heart, and a no less wonderful impression on his flesh; for nails began immediately to appear in his hands and in his feet, and on his right side a red wound, as though it had been pierced with a lance, from which wound blood often flowed. The servant of God, seeing the Stigmata thus deeply impressed on his flesh, so that he could not conceal them from his familiar companions, and yet fearing to discover the secret of the Lord, was in great trouble and perplexity whether he should declare or conceal what he had seen. He therefore called some of the brethren, and in general terms proposed his doubt to them, and asked their counsel. One of them answered him that it was better to make known the secrets of God for the benefit of others. He then related, with great modesty and fear, the vision he had beheld. At the close of the Lent he descended from the mount, and God was pleased to confirm this wonderful favour by great miracles, which have been approved by the infallible decisions of the Church.

Maxim of the Saint.

'The desire to imitate the Passion of Christ is an especial gift which the Holy Ghost confers on a soul which truly loves and serves God.'

Prayer.

O good and merciful Jesus, humbly prostrate at the foot of the cross, on which Thou didst die for love of us, we beg pardon for our many sins, and our ingratitude in corresponding so ill with the gifts and graces Thou hast conferred upon us; and we beseech Thee, who, for the inflaming our cold and tepid souls with the fire

of Thy love, wast pleased to renew the sacred marks of Thy Passion in the flesh of our blessed Father Francis, mercifully grant, through his merits and prayers, that we may always carry the cross in suffering all the humiliations and miseries of this mortal life, and now bring forth worthy fruits of penance; that, having been attached to Thy cross on earth, and suffered with Thee, we may come to reign with Thee hereafter in heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

ON THE SUBLIME SANCTITY TO WHICH ST. FRANCIS ATTAINED.

First Point.—'Sanctity,' says the celebrated Père Lacordaire, 'is the love of God and man carried to the most sublime and mysterious enthusiasm.' Most beautiful definition! for, as St. Paul tells us, all divine and human laws may be reduced to the love of God and our neighbour (and the one necessarily implies the other); whoever loves God and his neighbour fulfils the whole law. Although this may suffice to render a Christian pious and virtuous, and to secure his salvation, it is not sufficient to make him a saint in the ordinary sense of the word; to do this his love must be manifested by certain modes of action, which appear singular and exaggerated at first sight, and according to human wisdom *strange*; but when considered in the light of faith re-

veal an elevation and a moral beauty so sublime as to enforce the admiration of men, and disabuse them of their former misconceptions. For example, as the above-mentioned eloquent orator remarks, 'The action performed by St. Elizabeth of Hungary, in drinking the water with which she had just washed a repulsive leper, strikes one at first as unwise; but if we consider it more deeply we see in it her control over natural repugnances, and the ardour of her charity.' The greatness of her love is proved by her own words. 'I felt,' she says, 'so great sweetness and joy in benefitting that unfortunate man for the love of my God, that the smell and colour of that fetid water caused me no disgust.' Behold to what a height she carried her love of God and her neighbour. A love which can produce such works is in truth the secret source of holiness. God is usually pleased to show forth the sanctity of His servants by means of certain gifts which He bestows upon them, such as the power of working miracles, foreseeing future events, and other divine favours, so that men are drawn to love and venerate them, to call them saints, and place confidence in them; so true it is that virtue cannot remain long concealed, and can never fail of exciting admiration even in those who refuse to practise it. The degrees of sanctity are many and various, the love from which it springs having no limit, and the end to which it aspires being infinite, since Jesus Christ Himself has said, 'Be ye perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.' Thus we not only may, but we ought all of us to find a place on the great ladder of sanctity, because we are all called to it in a greater or less degree, and we can all attain to it if we will. God will not refuse the necessary graces; so if we are not saints the fault is entirely our own.

Second Point.—If we apply the idea of sanctity which we have just formed to St. Francis, we shall be convinced that he possessed it in so sublime and eminent a degree that he became a true copy of Jesus Christ, the model and example of the saints. Where shall we find a soul more inflamed with love for God and man than Francis, who is surnamed 'the Seraphic'? We have seen during this month how he possessed all virtues in a singular degree. What numbers of miracles he performed! He expelled devils, raised the dead, cured the sick, predicted future events, read the secrets of hearts, commanded irrational creatures; so great was the power of his sanctity that miracles were worked by objects he had touched, and the devils were forced to obey those who merely used his name. He was reverenced by the great ones of the earth. Popes, cardinals, bishops, kings, princes, nobles, magistrates, and even the great Sultan of Egypt recognised the power of his sanctity. He was venerated and loved by the people; when he arrived in any town or village the whole population would come forth to meet him, with the clergy, bearing boughs in their hands, chanting hymns of joy and gratitude, considering themselves happy if they could see or touch him, and in even kissing his foot-prints. We should never end if we were to attempt to repeat the eulogiums conferred upon him after his death by many great men. St. Bonaventure calls him 'the great light of the world, which at that time lay in darkness and the shadow of death;' St. Antoninus, 'a lamp burning before the Lord and illuminating the world;' St. Bernardin of Sienna, 'the herald of God sent to revive the practice of the Gospel of Christ;' Baronius, 'an apostolic man raised up by God to restore the glory *of the Church*, which had been sullied by the immorality

of Christians;' Bossuet, 'the marvel of his age;' others, 'one of the principal promoters of civilisation;' and even the Protestant Leo speaks of him as 'one of the most sublime of men.' All agree in considering him as the most perfect imitator of Jesus Christ, and this is doubtless the highest commendation that can be given him. The great idea which the Church has always had of his sanctity is shown by the process of his canonisation. The Sovereign Pontiff Gregory IX., his great friend, went to Assisi with all his court to perform the ceremony; he pronounced the panegyric proving that St. Francis, to use the language of Scripture, shone in the temple of God as the morning star amidst the clouds, as the moon in her fulness, and as the sun in all its splendour. The ceremony was performed in the very place where his holy body reposed, his miracles were publicly read, and he was declared to be a saint only two years after his death. Such a course was extraordinary and unusual. But if this is not enough to satisfy us, we have the testimony of God Himself, who honoured him by the sacred Stigmata, a gift so admirable and glorious as still to excite the astonishment of the Catholic world.

Third Point.—We thus behold Francis in that state of exalted sanctity to which he had been raised by the grace of God, and faithful correspondence on his part. We must recollect, my brethren, that, inspired by God, we have of our own free will chosen St. Francis for our model, master, and father; therefore we are bound to imitate him, and if it be not given to us to attain the marvellous heights of sanctity which he reached, we must walk in his footsteps, and strive to follow him as closely as possible. I know this will be difficult to poor human nature; but Christ tells us,

'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.' We have two very powerful aids in this combat, viz. divine grace and good example. St. Paul says, of himself he can do nothing; but he adds, 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me;' and we can and ought to say the same. Again, if no one had ever before followed in the arduous path traced out for us by St. Francis (and, indeed, by Jesus Christ), we might be, in part at least, excused; but no! thousands of our brethren have gone before us, and so happily finished their course as to deserve, like their holy Father, the title of saints. Let us now apply to ourselves the argument used by St. Augustin when he meditated on the virtues of the saints, 'If they could do so-and-so, why cannot *I* do the same?' Let us likewise say, 'If so many of our brethren have been able, by the help of God's grace and their own endeavours, to imitate St. Francis so closely, why should not we do the same?' Let us seriously determine never to be satisfied with the little virtue we may have acquired, or the little good we may have done. On this point the above-mentioned doctor says well, 'Be always dissatisfied with what you are if you wish to arrive at what you are not; if you say it is enough you are lost.' When St. Francis was almost ready to receive the crown prepared for his great virtues, he would repeat with sighs, 'Let us begin at last, my brethren, to serve the Lord our God, for hitherto we have done but little.' Who would not be moved at these words? And we expect to save our souls and to become saints by leading a slothful easy-going life, and with such very indifferent and imperfect virtue. This is indeed a miserable delusion and an inexcusable presumption.

EXAMPLE.

Amongst the many facts which might be adduced to show forth the eminent sanctity of St. Francis I have chosen one, in which God Himself seems to prove it to us. Being one day alone with Brother Leo, and not having his Breviary with him, he could not recite the divine office; he therefore composed a psalmody of humiliation in order to glorify God that night. Turning to Brother Leo, he said, 'Beloved brother, we must not allow this hour, consecrated to God, to pass without praising His holy name and confessing our own unworthiness. I will say the following verse: "O Brother Francis, thou hast committed so many sins, thou deservest to be cast into hell;" and you, Brother Leo, must answer me thus: "Truly thou deservest to be cast into the bottom of hell."' Leo promised; but when it came to the time for him to answer he said instead, 'Brother Francis, God has done so much good through thy means that thou wilt surely go to heaven.' The saint then said, almost angrily, 'You do not answer as you should do; here is another verse: "Brother Francis, thou hast offended God with so many wicked actions that thou deservest His malediction." And you must answer thus: "Truly thou deservest to be numbered amongst the damned."' Brother Leo promised faithfully to obey; but after the saint, beating his breast, amidst torrents of tears, had said what he proposed, Leo answered, 'Brother Francis, God will give thee a special benediction amongst the blessed.' 'Why will you not answer as I tell you?' said the holy Father, disturbed and astonished. 'I command you by holy obedience to repeat the words I am going to say to you. I will say, "O Brother Francis, miserable wretch, after so many sins committed against

the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, thinkest thou He will have pity upon thee? for indeed thou dost not deserve pardon." You must immediately answer, "Indeed thou art wholly undeserving of mercy."' But Brother Leo answered, 'God our Father, whose mercy infinitely surpasses thy sins, will pardon thee and fill thee with graces.' Then Francis, seriously displeased, exclaimed, 'How have you dared to transgress the precept of holy obedience, and to answer contrary to what I commanded you?' Brother Leo humbly excused himself, saying, 'Beloved Father, God is my witness that I always intended to repeat your words; but He put others into my mouth, and obliged me to speak them in spite of my resolution.' The humble servant of God admired the way of Divine Providence; but still persisting in his desire of humiliation, he besought Brother Leo to repeat after him, at least once, these words: 'O Brother Francis, miserable wretch, thinkest thou that God will have mercy on thee after thy many sins?' 'Yes, yes, Father,' answered Brother Leo, 'God our Saviour will have mercy on thee, and will bestow many special graces upon thee. He will exalt and glorify thee eternally, because he who humbles himself shall be exalted. Pardon me for not saying what you desire, for it is not I that speak; it is God who speaks through me;' and thus ended this holy contest of humility. Now, if we would not hold Francis for a great hypocrite, or that God was mocking him, we shall readily understand from this how profound was the humility of St. Francis, and how beloved he was of God.

MAXIM OF THE SAINT.

'Happy are they who persevere in the good they *have begun*.'

Prayer.

We acknowledge, O Lord, to our confusion, that we have not followed as we ought the example of our seraphic Father. We should have imitated him as closely as he imitated Thee; but, alas, we can scarcely be said to resemble him at all. His spirit of humility, poverty, and penance does not exist in us. We are still attached to this world, whilst he aspired so constantly after heavenly things as to appear a very angel upon earth. We have but little, if any, of the ardent love he possessed for Thee, for his neighbour, and for all creatures. Take pity on us, O Lord, lest we be overwhelmed with shame, lest our holy Father refuse to own us as his children and clients. Assist us by Thy grace, that we may begin now to run with greater fervour and courage in the path which he has traced out for us; strengthen us to overcome all obstacles and contradictions, that, having imitated his virtues as far as we may in this life, we may deserve to reign with him in heaven. Amen.

Five Paters, &c.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

Meditation.

on the sublime glory which st. francis enjoys in heaven.

First Point.—'If, beloved brethren,' says St. Gregory the Great, 'we consider how many and how great things are prepared for us in heaven, we shall despise all the things of earth. If we compare earthly goods

to eternal happiness we shall find them a burden rather than a solace. This life, compared with the next, is a death rather than a life. What tongue can ever express, what mind conceive, the joys of everlasting life? To be admitted amongst the angelic choirs; to behold with these blessed spirits the glory of our Creator; to see God face to face as He is; to contemplate that illimitable light; no longer to fear death, but to enjoy unending life,—the thought of these things inflames the soul with an ardent longing to possess them, and we desire to fly at once to that region of endless blessedness which we hope eternally to enjoy.' This paradise, of which we can form but a faint idea, is prepared for all, and we may possess it if we will, because, as Jesus Christ tells us, there are many thrones there, some more elevated than others, in ascending degrees, up to the very throne of the Most High. Our glory in heaven will be in proportion to our merits upon earth; every step which the just man takes in the way of perfection raises him to a fresh degree of glory, which becomes its reward. This thought should encourage us to be fervent in well-doing; never to stop in the way of salvation, and courageously to overcome the many obstacles which impede our onward course; and we should remember that all, even the least of our good works, our endeavours and labours, are weighed in the divine balance, and will receive a proportionate reward. Woe to him who says to himself, 'It is enough for me to save my soul; it is enough to enter the gate of paradise;' he exposes himself to the danger of being eternally excluded.

Second Point.—Since the glory of paradise is proportioned to the deserts of each one, to what a sub*lime height* must St. Francis be raised, who had such

an accumulation of merits, such amazing sanctity! Since Jesus Christ has said, 'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted,' what an elevated position Francis must hold in heaven, who not only humbled but annihilated himself constantly before God and man, so as to be called emphatically *the humble poor one of Assisi!* Since Jesus Christ has promised paradise to those who give even a cup of cold water in His name, what reward will He not bestow upon Francis, who performed innumerable works of mercy, who loved his neighbour so sincerely and efficaciously, and who saved so many souls! If Jesus Christ immediately admitted the penitent thief into paradise, whose only merit was that he asked this favour with a lively faith and sincere desire of forgiveness, what will He not do for Francis, who served Him so many years in purity and innocence, who for love of Him accomplished such great and holy works, and endured such pains, labours, and severe penances! If the contemplation of the divine mysteries sufficed to abstract Francis entirely from his senses, so that he remained rapt in sweet ecstasy, often raised so high above the earth as to be almost lost to view, what must he feel now in heaven, where he beholds God face to face, and completely satisfies the thirst of his ardent soul from the inexhaustible fountain of all beauty and wisdom! If the sound of a celestial instrument touched by a seraph's hand so overpowered him with sweetness as to cause him to swoon away, and to declare that had it lasted longer his soul must have left his body, what must it be in heaven, when he hears the angelic choirs chanting, not for a moment only, but for all eternity, hymns of glory to the Most High! Ah, we miserable mortals, sighing and groaning in this vale of tears, cannot form

even a faint idea of his joy. But we may rightly infer that as his sanctity was most elevated, so also is his glory.

Third Point.—Which of us, my brethren, does not envy our seraphic Father? Who would not desire to be beside Him in heaven? Well, what is to prevent it? The reason God called us to be His followers upon earth was precisely that we might be His companions in heaven. Possibly we may be unable to reach the exalted height to which he is raised in heaven; but that need not trouble us, for Christ assures us 'there are many mansions.' Let us remember the saying of the Apostle, 'He also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully;' and this other saying of St. Gregory, 'that we cannot arrive at a great reward excepting by great labours. Let the richness of the reward encourage us, that so we be not cast down by the weight of the labour.' Does God ask too much of us in commanding us to pass the few days of this life in mortification, humility, the observance of His law and our holy Rule, assisted as we are by His grace, in order to obtain eternal bliss? Does He ask too much in commanding us to abstain from fleeting pleasures, in order to inebriate us with celestial joys? O, surely not. The Apostle of the Gentiles tells us that all the sufferings of this world could not merit heaven for us unless God's mercy abound in us. Let us listen, my brethren, to the tender and loving words which our dear Father and master addresses to us for the last time; may they be deeply impressed upon our minds and hearts. 'O beloved brethren and ever-blessed children, hearken to me; hearken to the voice of your Father. We have promised great things; but greater are promised to us.

Let us keep what we have promised, and aspire to what are promised to us; the pleasure is brief, the punishment eternal; short is the suffering, infinite the reward. Many are called, few are chosen; there is retribution for all.'

EXAMPLE.

We repeat it: 'he who humbleth himself shall be exalted.' Francis, to whom nothing was so dear as to humble himself always, and to appear contemptible to all, appeared in the judgment of God far otherwise, as was shown in a vision granted to a holy and devout religious. Whilst he was praying fervently with St. Francis, in an old dilapidated church, he was rapt in ecstasy, and beheld many thrones prepared in heaven for the elect. One amongst them appeared more beautiful than the others; it was richly adorned with precious stones and shone resplendently. Whilst the religious wondered within himself at the extraordinary beauty of that elevated throne, he began to question as to whom it belonged. He then heard a voice saying to him, 'This throne belonged to one of the most beautiful of the rebel angels who fell from heaven through pride, and it is reserved for Francis as a reward for his humility.' When he returned from his ecstasy he followed the saint out of the church according to his custom, and whilst they were discoursing together of God, the brother, mindful of the vision he had seen, asked St. Francis what he thought of himself. The servant of God answered, 'I believe myself to be the greatest of sinners;' and when the brother replied that he could not say that in truth, nor believe it with a safe conscience, St. Francis added, 'Had Christ our Lord shown as great mercy to the most wicked of men as He has to me, I believe firmly that man would be more

grateful than I am.' Then the brother, perceiving in him such marvellous humility, remained more than ever convinced of the truth of the vision. This is related by St. Bonaventure.

Maxim of the Saint.

'So great is the joy which I expect that all pains are dear to me.'

Prayer.

O most glorious patriarch, our holy Father St. Francis, thou art the light and glory not only of thy country Italy, in which thou didst labour so indefatigably, but of the whole Christian world, which was enlightened by thy words and example. O founder, model, and master of the great Franciscan family, dispersed throughout the entire world; O mirror of the most noble and exalted virtues, which thou didst possess in so heroic a degree; thou straight and sure road of justice and truth, rule and model of all sanctity! From that high throne of glory on which thou art seated, shining as a resplendent star, cast down, we pray thee, a gentle look of love upon us thy children, who are weeping and sighing in this vale of misery and tears. Behold how we are surrounded by enemies, who persecute and insult us, and would destroy us if possible. We do not deny, nay we sincerely confess, that we have deserved this chastisement, since our lives have not been conformed to thy spirit, and we have not fulfilled our Christian and religious duties; but for this very reason we pray thee, O seraphic Father, to help us, that for the future, having repented of our sins and corrected our errors, we may so live as to be able to glory in being recognised by all as thy true children *and clients*; that, being like thee in the purity and

holiness of our lives upon earth, we may be united with thee in eternal happiness. Amen.

Five Paters, Aves, &c.

THIRTIETH DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE GREAT BENEFITS WHICH ST. FRANCIS HAS OBTAINED FOR THE CHURCH.

First Point.—One of the most beautiful of the petitions which our Divine Master has taught us to make to His Heavenly Father is, 'Thy kingdom come.' By these words we pray, among other things, that the kingdom of Christ—that is, the Church militant—may spread more and more, so as to cover the whole surface of the earth; thus we pray for infidels and Jews, that they may be converted to the true faith and receive the knowledge of the true God; we pray for schismatics and heretics, that they may return to the true Roman Church, from which they have culpably separated themselves. By this petition we pray also for those Catholics who, according to the Apostle, confess God with their lips, but deny Him in their deeds; we pray for them, that, enlightened from above, they may repent of their evil lives, and return as true, docile, obedient children of the Church. Such is the scope and intention of this petition, that the Church may be purged from all these adversaries, and, offering to God a perfectly pure and holy worship, may enjoy a true and universal peace. But we must not content

ourselves with praying; we must also *labour*. The Church is compared in Holy Scripture to a vineyard, which, that it may bring forth in its season abundant fruit, needs good and careful labourers to cultivate and tend it; and *we* are these labourers. It is compared to a rich harvest already ripe and abundant, needing reapers, that the precious grain may not fall to the ground and perish; and we are these reapers. It is compared to a well-provisioned and strong fortress, surrounded by innumerable and powerful enemies ever striving to beat it down and destroy it, and therefore it has need of constant and effectual defence, that it may not suffer losses or injuries; and we are these soldiers that defend it. Every faithful Christian, therefore, if he desires to have a place in the Church triumphant in heaven, must exert himself by word and work for the welfare and defence of the Church militant on earth, of which he is a son, a member, and a subject. Specially are those bound to do so who are called to this work by God Himself, through a particular vocation and grace; and such are priests and religious.

Second Point.—Francis, raised by God to defend and preserve the Catholic Church, was doubtless bound in a special manner to apply all his strength, and the strength of his children, to this great work. We have already seen how perfectly he fulfilled his own part, with marvellous and unexampled activity, and with admirable complete success. It now remains to prove how he continued this work through his children, who, animated by his example and his instructions, strove earnestly to imitate him in all things. To do this fully, we must unfold the history of more than three thousand saints and blessed of the three Orders instituted by him, who, *through* their humble, penitent, and exemplary lives,

have been at all times a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Of these, quite a thousand and seven hundred have been crowned with martyrdom, from the five beheaded in Morocco in the time of St. Francis to the eight not long ago cruelly slain in Syria; all these have confessed and defended with their life-blood the faith of Christ in every part of the world, but specially in Palestine, that land already hallowed by the Blood and footprints of the Son of God. As yet further proof, we might unfold the history of so many thousands of missionaries, who, inflamed with the love of God and their neighbour, from the first seven sent by our seraphic Father up to those of the present day, have generously gone forth to carry the light of the Gospel to all barbarous and infidel nations. This is indeed the greatest glory of our Order, that whilst the powers of darkness, in these latter times, seek to deprive us of labourers, our work continues fruitful and vigorous. We might unfold the history of the multitude of illustrious doctors who, by their words and their immortal writings, have instructed and defended Catholic doctrine in dogma and in moral. At their head, and rising above all, stands St. Bonaventure, worthy to take in the schools the preëminent place which is indeed his own. We must, too, unfold the history of the innumerable army of so many sons of St. Francis, our own brethren, who, with their prudence, doctrine, and upright lives, have borne with dignity the mitre and the purple; and even the tiara has shed fresh lustre on the habit of the poor one of Assisi. In fact, we should have to unfold the whole of Church history, from the days of St. Francis to our own; for his sons have ever taken part in all the great undertakings for the glory of God and the spiritual good of the human

family, and hence the deep sincere thanksgivings which have been returned to them by grateful hearts.

Third Point.—Now, my dear brethren, let us take heed to this; for I say, once again, it is by a most happy good fortune that we are indeed sons of so great a Father, and brethren to the noble multitude of his children, who, either by the apostolate of doctrine, or the apostolate of sanctity, or by both together, have laboured so well for the Church of God. The same duty is incumbent on us; we must fulfil it, each one according to his ability, and the condition in which he is placed, if we would not degenerate from our ancestors.

It is true that modern society appears at present weary of religious, and that everywhere they are persecuted and expelled; but this is only a moment of frenzy on its part, and a time of trial for religious. Let us, then, make use of this trial: certainly we are not free from defects; so let us mend them, and before long we shall see society show that it needs us, and calls on us for help. And, on the other hand, our Mother Church, who has loved us, and does love us, as her dearest sons, does indeed need us now more than ever that she is assailed by such senseless and cruel enemies, who have sworn to destroy and annihilate her. Then let every one, according to his strength and the gifts accorded to him by God, hasten to her succour, whether it be by a prompt and distant journey to infidels, if so commanded, or by preaching the divine word from pulpits, or teaching the sacred sciences from the professor's chair, or by writings, diffusing Catholic doctrine and inducing men to love it. Or if we are not capable of these things, let us exert ourselves with alacrity in other offices—more humble ones indeed, but *not less* fruitful to our neighbour, such as hearing con-

fessions, educating youth, tending the infirm, having care of the house of God, and, above all, by the example of a pure and holy life: thus, and thus only, shall we show ourselves worthy of belonging to the glorious Franciscan family.

EXAMPLE.

At a time in the beginning of the foundation of his Order, when our holy patriarch had but few disciples, he was one day rapt in ecstasy, and knew by divine revelation the future of the Order. Then, having returned to himself, he went to his disciples, and said to them, 'Take courage, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord! Let not our small number dishearten you, nor my simplicity and yours alarm you; for God has shown me clearly that by His blessing He will spread through the entire world this family, of which He is the Father. I would fain keep silence on what I have seen, but charity compels me to make it known to you. I have seen a great multitude coming to us to receive the same habit and to lead the same life. I have seen the roads thronged with men, all coming to address us. The French come, the Spaniards hasten, the English and the Germans run towards us—all nations are moved, and my ears are filled with the sounds of footsteps hurrying hither and thither to fulfil the commands of holy obedience.'

My brethren, a prophecy so marvellous reminds us, as so many authors of the life of the saint have observed, of that of the Prophet Isaiah concerning the foundation of the Universal Church: 'Jerusalem, thou that sayest I am barren, lift up thine eyes round about and see; all these are gathered together, they come to thee, I see them; the least shall become a thousand, and the little one a most strong nation.'

And in truth the event has verified, in the face of all the world, this prophecy of our holy patriarch. For in a very short time he had an immense number of religious; his Order extended itself through all the known parts of the world with extraordinary rapidity, so that on this account this may be considered as an image of the beginning and progress of the Church; and therefore in this, as well as in so many other ways, St. Francis may be considered a beautiful copy of the Divine Founder Jesus.

Maxim of the Saint.

'My brethren, the Lord has called us to labour for the faith, and to aid the prelates and clergy of His Holy Church.'

Prayer.

Look down, O Lord, from the high throne of Thy mercy; look down, we pray Thee, with love on Thy Catholic Church, Thy beloved spouse, for whom Thou didst pour forth all Thy Blood, for whom Thou didst meet a cruel and ignominious death! Behold all the evils that assail Thy Church: the innumerable errors which seek to infect her holy doctrine, the hateful and deadly vices which seek to defame her holy morals, the pride and insubordination which obstinately oppose the authority with which, in Thy name, she rules and governs; behold her many perverse children, who seek to lead others from her. Evils abound, but do Thou, we beseech Thee, now, as in times past, bestow Thy strength on the faithful, especially on the followers of our holy Father St. Francis; fill them with the spirit of their holy patriarch in such a manner, that the children of this world, *won by their sanctity*, may know and detest the errors

in which they are plunged, and repent of their sins. Thus, through the means of the vast Franciscan family, may Thy promise be fulfilled, that all Thy sheep shall hear Thy voice, and there shall be one fold under one Shepherd.

Five Paters, Aves, &c., as page 7.

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

Preparatory prayer, as page 1.

MEDITATION.

ON THE GREAT GOOD WHICH ST. FRANCIS HAS OBTAINED FOR THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY.

First Point.—First of all, we must bear in mind, that to procure the welfare of the Church and religion is at the same time to procure the welfare of our country and the whole of society. If the truth is admitted, that *preëminent* truth, that the highest good which a man can work is that which he does for his own soul, that he may render it capable of eternal bliss, it must be at the same time evident that our country and the whole human race can be made happy in the fullest sense, through the welfare of the Church and religion. And if an ordinary mind, recognising the truths of real happiness, and of man's last end, is bound to admit this, how much more shall a thorough Christian and a good Catholic realise it! The motives of all his actions are the love of God and his neighbour, and with equal fidelity he may be said to obtain for humanity temporal and spiritual blessings. The spiritual are the indispensable absolute end; the temporal

are a help and stimulus for obtaining that end. This is quite in accordance with the instructions of our Divine Master, when He says to us: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all those things shall be added unto you.' Every one will see the reasonableness of this; for by none has the good of society been promoted with such solicitude and zeal as by true Catholics, and those specially endowed by God with noble thoughts and sublime virtues. All, except those whose minds are void of history, know very well that true civilisation, with all its benefits, has progressed side by side with Christianity; wherever Christianity has been received civilisation has been introduced; but where it has but little penetrated, or been banished, there we find nothing but misery, ignorance, and barbarism. We have a striking proof of this in our much-vaunted European civilisation, which certainly never could have had an existence, had not Christianity, or more truly Catholicism, been rooted in its nations, a truth which none having a grain of sense in their head can deny. This has caused an illustrious Protestant, in his *History of Civilisation*, to say, 'In every time, in every country, religion has gloried in having civilised the nations.' To speak only of the saints, and a few of the most distinguished among them, who shall ever be able to estimate the good done to human society by St. Gregory the Great, St. Gregory VII., St. Pius V., St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, and St. Vincent of Paul?

Second Point.—To come to ourselves, who can express all the good done to human society by St. Francis and his sons? and yet modern society cries out against these humble friars—friends of the poor—and would *banish them* altogether as useless and burdensome. If

the world desires works of philanthropy (that word so constantly on the lips of those who never practise it), what a number may be seen in the beneficent Order of St. Francis!

Some of the greatest and most useful institutions for poor humanity, the *Monti di Pietà*, are the works of Franciscans, specially of B. Bernardino da Feltre and St. James of Marca. One of the most literary of Italians of the present time cites the example of a son of the 'poor one of Assisi' as the best type of beneficence. Or again, if this boastful modern society demands men versed in science, we can point to the libraries, and there stand documents as incontestable witnesses more eloquent in their silence than all the heated declamations against the ignorance of religious. Are we asked to produce men who have undertaken long journeys in the cause of science, and made important discoveries? We may permit a distinguished writer of our days to say for us, 'Columbus found among the Friars of Rabida that which kings and courts denied him.' America would never have been discovered, or, at any rate, not till much later, but for the Friars Minor. In fact, it was through the intercession and help of a son of St. Francis that the immortal Genoese finally gained from the great Isabella of Spain all things necessary for this arduous enterprise. A son of St. Francis was the first priest to land in the New World, to plant the first cross, and first to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. What is there great and useful for true civilisation which has not come from St. Francis! The Order of the Friars Minor, animated and moved by the spirit of its glorious founder, has in all times produced fervent, devout, contemplative souls, zealous missioners of the divine word, resplendent luminaries of the

ecclesiastical hierarchy, and at the same time has always supplied the world with studious learned men in every branch of science, letters, and fine arts. Wise rulers of kingdoms have sprung from the Order, and, when society has needed it, valiant invincible captains; one name is enough as example—St. John of Capistrano, who, having collected under the standard of the cross a numerous army, marched against the most formidable and fierce enemies of civilisation and Christianity, then threatening the whole of Europe, and entirely conquered and destroyed them beneath the walls of Belgrade.

Justly, therefore, the great ones of our age count it an honour to belong to St. Francis; the flights of poetry, the graces of the pencil or sculptor's chisel, the sweetness of melody, have been ennobled in illustrating those great immortal deeds of the Order which has had so great a part in the civilisation of the world.

Third Point.—Is the world, then, ignorant of these glories of the seraphic Order? O no, my brethren; it knows them as it knows the glory of the other religious Orders, or of the whole Catholic Church. And why, instead of displaying admiration and gratitude, does it cry out against them, as against the enemies of progress and civilisation? Is not, however, the Church the beloved spouse of her Founder Jesus Christ? Are not all the religious Orders followers of our crucified Lord Jesus, and are not we so in a special manner? If so, what wonder, then, if a corrupt society flings on us the same reproaches which it once launched against our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, crying out death and the cross? Our duty in such moments of social aberration is to take on our shoulders the cross, which these vaunted friends of progress have prepared for us, and *to follow* our Head Jesus to Calvary; for our true pro-

gress is in imitating entirely our crucified Love, sole object of the ardent love of our seraphic holy patriarch, sole life of true civilisation, sole inspiration of our Order. Let us not, then, lose sight of our crucified Love while we tread the painful way of Calvary, amid the insults offered us by the degenerate civilisation of our age; let us bear all tribulations, persecutions, and contempt of the ungrateful children of this world with humility and resignation; let us courageously ascend the steep and arduous mount of myrrh, in the certainty that we shall thus purify our souls more and more from the imperfections contracted by our intercourse with the world, and become more worthy of our Order and the name we bear. Finally, let us pray for our persecutors in the spirit of Jesus crucified; and when we shall have arrived at the summit of our Calvary as a reward of our sufferings we shall be deemed worthy once again to embrace the whole world, and to baptise it once more in the true civilisation of Calvary.

Example.

One day, after St. Francis had returned to himself from one of those ecstasies which were of frequent occurrence with him, Jesus Christ appeared to him seated on a stone, which served the saint for a table, and with the loving familiarity of a friend spoke to him of the protection which He would give the Order, and revealed to him four things.

These four promises—for such were the revelations—show in a very marked way the exceeding love which our Blessed Lord bears to the seraphic Order, and at the same time hold forth rewards of temporal blessings for the great good bestowed by it on society. The first was a promise the Order should last to the end of

the world; the second, that those who with malice persecute it should not live long unless they repented; the third and the fourth were graces leading to eternal salvation promised by our Saviour, not only to Friars Minor, but to all who were sincere in their affection to them. These are indeed great graces and promises; but there is nothing incredible about any of them. As for the first, there is no difficulty about it—whether we consider the multiplicity of its families, by which it has reproduced and, as it were, multiplied itself, or again its wide extension throughout the world, or its popularity. As for the second, it is quite what we should expect that Divine Justice should punish with premature death all who should have the malice and boldness to persecute an Order expressly instituted to serve the Church, and to procure blessings for all the world. Then as regards the special promises of salvation made to the Friars Minor and their friends: if we reflect on them we shall see them to be the special graces which God bestows on those religious who have had the courage to embrace a life entirely evangelical and apostolical, and to those good Catholics who give such a proof of their lively faith by their affection to this holy Order. Let it never be forgotten that these graces exact on our side a constant, generous, and faithful correspondence, without which let none hope for the rewards of the next life, in whatever condition he may be. For it would indeed be a deplorable and monstrous self-deceit if any one neglecting his obligations should assure himself of salvation solely because he is a son of St. Francis or has an affection to the Order.

Maxim of the Saint.

'I tell you in truth, that the Lord has chosen and sent the Friars Minor for the good and salvation of the whole world.'

Prayer.

My God, how is the whole world gone astray! Disorder, anarchy, and irreligion reign, and this has been the work of evil and malicious men, who have declared implacable war against God, the Church, and all that is religious and sacred. And what is sadder still, even the reins of government are in the hands of these wicked men, who have all things according to their will, so that worse and worse evils are to be feared. O Thou our Saviour, who commandest the winds and the waves, and makest them still and at rest, stretch forth the right hand of Thy power on the stormy sea of this world, so that once again calm and peace may return. Grant that the people, taught by a sorrowful experience, may learn that their true happiness, their true civilisation and progress, consist in loving Thee, following Thee, and imitating Thee, so that, seeing the extreme danger which threatens them, they may return repentant to their loving Mother the Church, who, full of longing, stretches out her arms to them. And above all, we pray that Thou wouldst revive in our hearts the spirit of our seraphic Order, for it is Thy Spirit; give us strength to follow completely our patriarch, and thus with certainty follow Thee in the way of sanctity, love, and suffering. Thus, too, shall we persevere in the work of our sanctification and that of our neighbour, Thy one desire for us, the one constant end of all the actions of Thy most faithful servant Francis, the one aspiration of his true sons and

followers; so that, having completely fulfilled Thy divine will on earth, we may one day attain to enjoying Thy glory in heaven.

Five Paters and Aves, &c.

To conclude with Te Deum.

THE END.

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